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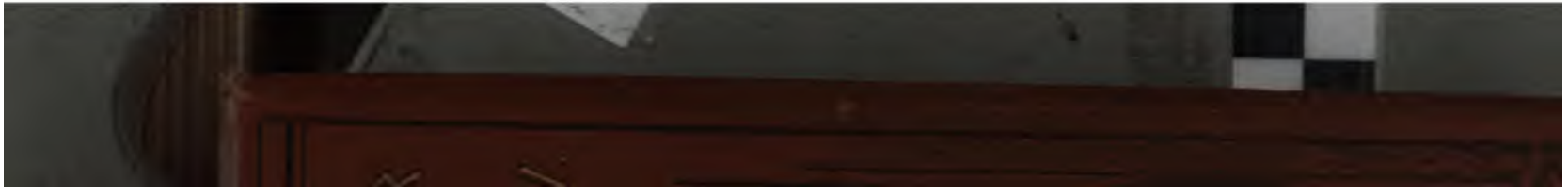
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GRETTIR THE OUTLAW:

A STORY OF ICELAND.





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THORKELL AND THE OUTLAWED GRETTIR LEAVE THE ASSIZE.

GRETTIR THE OUTLAW:

A STORY OF ICELAND.

BY

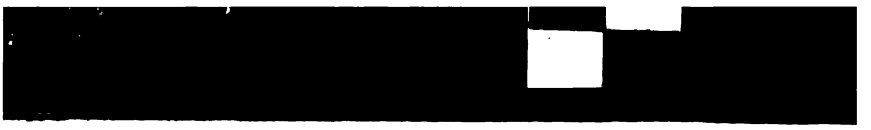
S. BARING-GOULD,

Author of "John Herring;" "Mehalah;" "Iceland: its Scenes and Sagas;" "Germany, Past and Present;' &c.

WITH TEN PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. ZENO DIEMER, AND A COLOURED MAP.



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PREFACE.

TO MY YOUNG READERS.

It is now just thirty years since I first began to read the "Saga of Grettir the Strong" in Icelandic. At that time I had only a Danish grammar of Icelandic and an Icelandic-Danish dictionary, and I did not know a word of Danish. So I had to learn Danish in order to learn Icelandic.

It was laborious work making out the Saga, and every line when I began took me some time to understand. Moreover, I had not much time at my disposal, for then I was a master in a school.

Now, after I had worked a little way into the Saga, I became intensely interested in it myself, and it struck me that my boys whom I taught might like to hear about Grettir. So I tried every day to translate, after school hours, a chapter, hardly ever more at first, and sometimes not even as much as that. Then, when on half-holidays I proposed a walk to some of my scholars, they were keen to hear the story of Grettir. Well, Grettir went on for some months in this way, a fresh instalment of the tale coming every half-holiday, and it was really wonderful how interested and delighted the boys were with the story. Nor was I less so; the labour of translation which was so great at first became rapidly lighter, and I was as much interested in the adventures of the hero as

were the boys. The other day I met an old pupil of mine, and almost the first thing he said to me was: "Oh! do you remember Grettir? Thirty years ago! Fancy! I am a married man and have boys of my own, and I have often tried to tell them the story which made such an impression on me, but I cannot remember all the incidents nor their order. I do wish you would write it as a story for boys. I should like to read it myself again, and my boys would love it." "Very well," I said, "I will do so."

Now my boy readers must understand that I have told them the story in my own words and in my own way. I went to Iceland in 1861, and went over nearly every bit of the ground made famous by the adventures of Grettir. Consequently, I am able to help out and illustrate the tale by what I actually saw. In the original book there is a great deal more than I have attempted to retell, but much has to do with the ancestors of Grettir, and there are other incidents introduced of no great importance and very confusing to the memory. So I have taken the leading points in the story, and given them.

S. BARING-GOULD.

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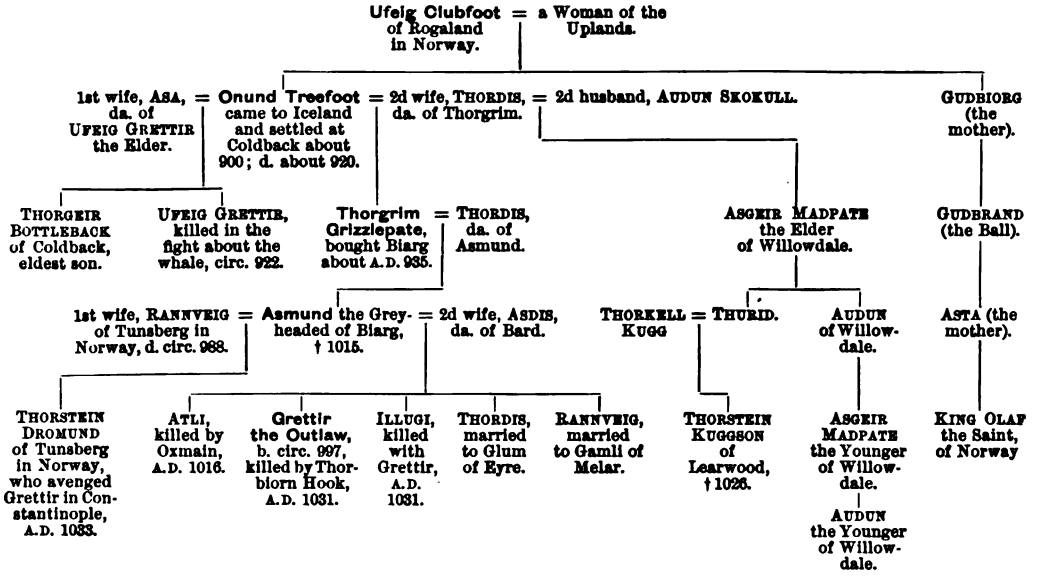
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PEDIGREE OF THE FAMILY OF ASMUND OF BIARG.



GRETTIR THE OUTLAW.

CHAPTER I.

WINTER TALES.

IT was night—drawing on to midnight—in summer, that I who write this book arrived at the little lonely farm of Biarg, on the Middle River, in the north of Iceland. It was night, near on midnight, and yet I could hardly call it night, for the sky overhead was full of light of the clearest amethyst, and every stock and stone was distinctly visible. Across the valley rose a rugged moor, and above its shoulder a snow-clad mountain, turned to rosy gold by the night sun. As I stood there watching the mist form on the cold river in the vale below, all at once I heard a strange sound like horns blowing far away

in the sky, and looking up, I saw a train of swans flying from west to east, bathed in sunlight, their wings of silver, and their feathers as gold.

I had come all the way from England to see Biarg, for there was born, about the year A.D. 997, a man called Grettir, whose history I had read, and which interested me so much that I was resolved to see his native home, and the principal scenes where his stormy life was passed.

The landscape was the same as that on which Grettir's childish eyes had looked more than eight hundred and fifty years ago. The same outline of dreary moor, the same snowy ridge of mountain standing above it, catching the midnight summer sun, the same mist forming over the river; but the house was altogether different. Now there stood only a poor heap of farm-buildings, erected of turf and wood, where had once been a noble hall of wood, with carved gable-ends, surrounded by many out-houses.

Before we begin on the story of Grettir, it will be well to say a few words about its claim to be history.

Iceland never was, and it is not now, a much-peopled island. The farmhouses are for the most part far apart, and the farms are of very considerable extent, because, owing to the severity of the climate, very little pasturage is obtained over a wide extent of country for the sheep and cattle. The population lives round the coast, on the fiords or creeks of the sea, or on the rivers that flow into these fiords. The centre of the island is occupied by a vast waste of ice-covered mountain, and desert black as ink strewn with volcanic ash and sand, or else with a region of erupted lava that is impassable, because in cooling it has exploded, and forms a country of bristling spikes and gulfs and sharp edges, very much like the wreck of a huge ginger-beer bottle factory.

What are now farmhouses were the halls and mansions of families of noble descent. Indeed, the original settlers in Iceland were the nobles of Norway who left their native land to avoid the tyranny of Harold Fairhair, who tried to crush their power so as to make himself a despotic king in the land.

These Norse nobles came in their boats to Iceland, bringing with them their wives, children, their thralls or slaves, and their cattle; and they settled all round the coast. The present Icelanders are descended from these first colonists.

Now, the history of Iceland for a few hundred years consists of nothing but the history of the quarrels of these great families. Iceland was without any political organization, but it had an elected lawman or judge, and every year the heads of the families rode to Thingvalla, a plain in the southwest, where they brought their complaints, carried on their lawsuits, and had them settled by the judge. There was no army, no navy, no government in Iceland for a long time; also no foreign wars, and no internal revolutions.

These noble families settled in the valleys and upon the fiords thought a good deal of themselves, and they carefully preserved, at first orally then in writing, the record of their pedigrees, and also the tradition of the famous deeds of their great men.

In summer there is no night; in winter, no day.

In winter there is little or nothing to be done but sit over the fire, sing songs, and tell yarns. Now, in winter the Icelanders told the tales of the brave men of old in their families, and so the tradition was handed on from father to son, the same stories told every winter, till all the particulars became well known. At the same time there can be no doubt that little embellishments were added, some exaggerations were indulged in, and here and there the grand deed of some other man was grafted into the story of the family hero. About two hundred or two hundred and fifty years after the death of Grettir, his history was committed to writing, and then it became fixed—nothing further was added to it, and we have his story after having travelled down over two hundred years as a tradition. That was plenty of time for additions and emendations, and the hobgoblin and ghost stories that come into his life are some of these embellishments. But the main facts of his life are true history. We are able to decide this by comparing his story with those of other families in the same part of the island, and to

see whether they agree as to dates, and as to the circumstances narrated in them.

In the north-west of Iceland is an immense bay called the Huna-floi, which branches off into several creeks, the largest of which is called the Ramsfirth, and the next to that is the Middlefiord. Into this flows a river that has its rise in the central desert, in a perfect tangle of lakes. Three rivers issuing from these lakes unite just above Biarg, and pour their waters a short morning's ride lower through sands into the Middlefirth.

The valley is not cheerful, running from north to south. Biarg lies on the east side, and faces the western sun. The moor which lies behind it, and forms the hill on the other side of the river, is not broken and picturesque, and if it were not for the peak of Burfell, covered with snow a good part of the year, the view from Biarg would be as uninteresting as any to be found in the land. But then, when one rides down to the coast, or ascends the moor, what a splendid view bursts on the sight! The great Polar Sea is before one, intensely blue,





not with the deep ultramarine of the Mediterranean, but with the blue of the nemophyla or forget-me-not, rolling in from the mysterious North; and across the mighty bay of the Huna-floi can be seen the snowy mountains of that extraordinary peninsula which runs out to the north-west of Iceland, and is only just not converted into an island because connected with Iceland by a narrow strip of land. That great projection is like a hand with fiords between the fingers of land, and glacier-mountains where are the knuckles; but the wrist is very narrow indeed, only about one English mile across, and there lies a trough along this junction, with a little stream and a lake in it. Now, at this wrist, as we may call it, lies the farm of Eyre, where, somewhat later, lived the sister of Grettir, who married a man that farmed there, named Glum.

Looking away across the great blue bay, the mountains of the hand may be seen rising out of the sea, and looking like icebergs.

Grettir the Strong was the son of a well-to-do bonder, or yeoman, who lived at Biarg, and was

descended from some of the great nobles of Norway. His father's name was Asmund with the Greyhead, and his mother's name was Asdis.

He had a brother called Atli, a gentle, kindly young fellow, who never wittingly quarrelled with anyone, and was liked by all with whom he had to do. He had also two sisters — one was called Thordis, and she was married to Glum of Eyre—but neither come into the story; and he had another sister called Rannveig, who was married to Gamli of Melar, at the head of Ramsfirth. He had also a little brother called Illugi, of whom more hereafter.

Grettir was not a good-looking boy; he had reddish hair, a pale face full of freckles, and light blue eyes. He was broad-built, not tall as a boy, though in the end he grew to be a very big man.

He was not considered a good-tempered or sociable boy. He seemed lazy and sullen; he liked to sit by the fire without speaking to anyone, listening to what was said, and brooding over what he had heard.

If his father set him a task, he did it so unwill-

ingly, and so badly that Asmund Greyhead regretted having set him to do anything.

Now, during the winter, as we have already seen, when there is but a very little daylight, and the nights are vastly long, when, moreover, the whole land is deep in snow, so that there is no farm-work that can be done, and no travelling about to visit neighbours, it was, and is still, usual in Iceland for those in the house to tell tales, or sagas, as they are called. Some of these sagas relate to the old gods of the Norsemen, some are fabulous stories of old heroes who never existed, or, if they did exist, have had all sorts of fantastic legends tacked on to their histories; but other sagas are the tales of the doings of ancestors of the family.

Now, among the sagas that Grettir used to hearken to with greatest delight was that of old Onund Treefoot, his great-grandfather, who first settled in Iceland. And this was the tale:

Onund, the son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, son of Ivar the Smiter, was a mighty Viking in Norway; that is,



he went about every summer harrying the coasts of England, Ireland, and Scotland. He joined with three friends, and they had five ships together, and one summer they sailed to the Hebrides—which were then called the Sudereys, or southern isles. The Bishop of the Isle of Man is still called Bishop of Sodor and Man, because his diocese originally included the Sudereys. Then out against them came Kiarval, king of the Hebrides, with five ships, and they gave him battle, and there was a hard fray. But the men of Onund were the mightiest warriors. On each side many fell, but the end of the battle was that the king fled with only one ship. So Onund took the four vessels and great spoil, and he wrought great havoc on the coast, plundering and burning, and so in the fall of the year returned to Norway. In the history of England, and in that of Scotland and of Ireland, we read of the terrible annoyance given to the natives of Great Britain and Ireland by the northern pirates; and, indeed, they conquered Dublin, and established a kingdom there, and also took to themselves Orkney. Well, when

Onund returned to Norway he did not find that matters were pleasant there; for King Harald the Unshorn had begun to establish himself sole king in Norway. Hitherto there had been many small kings and earls; but Harald had taken an oath that he would not cut or trim his hair till he had subdued all under his power, and made himself supreme throughout the land.

A great many bonders and all the little kings united against him, and there was a great battle fought at Hafrsfiord—the greatest battle that had as yet been fought in Norway. Onund was in the battle along with his friend, King Thorir Longchin, and he set his ship alongside of that of King Longchin. King Harald ran his ship up alongside of that of Longchin, grappled it, and boarded it. There was a furious fight, and Harald sent on board his Bearsarks, a set of half-mad ruffians, who wore not bear but wolf skins, and who were said to lead charmed lives, so that no weapon would wound them. Thorir Longchin and all his men were killed; and then King Harald cut away the ship and ran up against



that of Onund. Onund was in the fore part, and he fought manfully. As the grappling-irons of Harald caught his ship, Onund made a sweep with his longsword at the man who threw the irons, and in so doing he put his leg over the bulwark. Then one on the king's ship threw a spear at Onund. He saw it flung, and leaned his head back to let it fly over him, and as he did so one on the king's ship smote at him with a battle-axe, and the axe fell on his leg below the knee and shore his leg off. Then Onund fell back on board his own vessel, and his men carried him across into that of a friend named Thrand, who lay alongside of him on the other board. And Thrand had a great cauldron there of pitch boiled, and Onund set his knee in the boiling pitch, and never blinked nor uttered a cry. That staunched the blood. If he had not done this he would have bled to death.

Now, Thrand saw that King Harald was gaining the mastery everywhere, so he fled away with his ship and sailed west.

Onund was healed of his wound, but ever after

he walked with a wooden leg, and that is why he got the name of Onund Treefoot.

After the battle of Hafrsfiord, Onund could only return to Norway by stealth, and he could not recover his lands there, so he deemed it wisest for him to sail away and seek a home elsewhere. That is how he left Norway and settled in Iceland.

And when King Harald saw himself lord and master through all the land, then he had his hair trimmed and combed, and it was so long and so beautiful, that ever after he who had been called "The Unshorn" went by the name of "Fairhair," and in history he is known as King Harald Fairhair.

CHAPTER II.

HOW GRETTIR PLAYED ON THE ICE.

THERE are several tales told of Grettir when he was a boy, which show that he was a rough and unkindly lad. He was set by his father to keep geese on the moors, and this made him angry, so he



threw stones at the geese and killed or wounded them all.

The old man suffered from lumbago, and in winter when unwell asked his wife and the boys to rub his back by the fire; but when Grettir was required to do this, he lost his temper, and on one occasion he snatched up a wool-carding comb and dug it into his old father's back.

Many other things he did which made those at home not like him, and there was not much love lost between him and his father. The fact was that Grettir was a headstrong, wilful fellow, and bitterly had he to pay in after life for this youthful wilfulness and obstinacy. It was these qualities, untamed in him, that wrecked his whole life, and it may be said brought ruin and extinction on his family. There were great and good qualities in Grettir's nature, but they did not show when he was young; only much suffering and cruel privations brought out in the end the higher and nobler elements that were in him.

It is so with all who have any good in them, if

by early discipline it is not manifested, then it is brought out by the rough usage of misfortune in after life.

And now I will give one incident of Grettir's boyhood. It was a favourite amusement for young fellows at that time to play golf on the ice, and in winter, when the Middlefirth was frozen over, large parties assembled there for the sport.

One winter a party was arranged for a match on the ice, and a good many lads came to Middlefirth from Willowdale, a valley only separated from the Middlefirth by a long shoulder of ugly moor. The Willowdales-men had a much better sheet of water, a very large lake called Hop, into which their river flowed, before discharging itself into the sea; and the return match was to be played on Hop.

Among the young fellows who came from Willowdale was Audun, a fine, strapping fellow; frank, well-built, good-looking, and amiable.

When the parties were assembled at the place, there they were paired off according to age and strength; and on this occasion I am speaking of,



Grettir, who was fourteen, was set to play with Audun, who was two years older than he, and a head taller.

Audun struck the ball and it flew over Grettir's head, and he missed it, and it went skimming away over the ice to a great distance, and Grettir had to run after it. Some of those who were looking on laughed. Then Grettir's anger was roused. He got the ball and came back carrying it, till he was within a few yards of Audun, and then, instead of dropping the ball, and striking it with his golfing-stick, he suddenly threw it with all his force against his adversary, and struck him between his eyes, so that it half-stunned him, and cut the skin. Audun whirled his golfing-bat round, and struck at Grettir, who dodged under and escaped the blow. Then Audun and Grettir grappled each other, and wrestled on the ice.

Every one thought that Audun would have the stumpy, thick-set boy down in a trice, but it was not so; Grettir held his ground;—they swung this way, that way; now one seemed about to be cast,

and then the other, and although Audun was almost come to a man's strength, he could not for a long time throw Grettir. At last Grettir slipped on a piece of ice where some had been sliding, and went down. His blood was up, so was that of Audun; and the fight would have been continued with their sticks, had not Grettir's brother Atli thrown himself between the combatants and separated them. Atli held his brother back, and tried to patch up the quarrel.

"You need not hold me like a mad dog," said Grettir. "Thralls wreak their vengeance at once, cowards never."

Audun and Grettir were distant cousins. They were not allowed to play against each other any more, and the rest went on with their game.

CHAPTER III.

OF THE RIDE TO THINGVALLA.

THERE lived in Waterdale, a day's journey from Biarg, an old bonder, named Thorkel Krafla. He was the first Icelander who became a Christian.



In heathen times, among the Northmen as among the Romans, it was allowable for parents to expose their children to death, if they did not want to have the trouble of rearing them. Now Thorkel had been so exposed, with a napkin over his face. It so happened that a great chief called Thorkel Mani was riding along one day, thinking about the gods that he had been taught to believe in, who drank and got drunk, and fought each other, and, being a grave, meditative man, he could not make out what these rollicking, fighting gods could have had to do with the world,—with the creation of sun, moon, and stars, and the earth with its yield. He thought to himself, "There must be some God above these tipsy, quarrelsome deities; and this higher God must love men, and be good and kind to men."

As he thought this, he heard a little whimpering noise from behind a stone; he got off his horse, and went to see what produced this noise, and found there a poor little baby, that with its tiny hands had rumpled up the kerchief which had been spread over its nose and mouth. Thorkel Mani took up

the deserted babe in his arms, and looking up to heaven, to the sun, said, "If the good God, who is high over all, called this little being into life, gave it eyes and mouth and ears and hands and feet, He surely never intended His handiwork to be cast out as a thing of no value, to die. For the love of Him I will take this child."

Then Thorkel Mani rode home, carrying the baby in his arms; and he called it by his own name, Thorkel; but to distinguish it from himself, it was given the nickname Krafla, which means to rumple, because the babe had rumpled up the kerchief, so as to let its cries be heard. So the child grew up, and kept the name through life of Thorkel Rumple. This Thorkel became a very great man, and Godi, or magistrate, of the Waterdale; and, as I have said, he was the first man to become a Christian, when missionaries of the gospel came to Iceland.

Very soon after Grettir's birth Christianity became general, and in the year 1000 was sanctioned by law; but there were few Christian priests in the land,

so that the knowledge of the truth had not spread much, and taken hold and transformed men's lives. Thorkel Rumple was now very old. He was the bosom friend of Asmund, and every year when in the spring he rode to the great assizes at Thingvalla, he always halted at least one night at Biarg. Not only were Asmund and he men of like minds, and friends, but they were also connected. In the spring of the year 1011, Thorkel arrived as usual at Biarg, attended by a great many men, and he was most warmly received by Asmund and his wife. He remained with them three nights, and he and they fell a-talking about the prospects of the two young men, Atli and Grettir. Asmund told his kinsman that Atli was a quiet, amiable fellow, now at man's estate, and likely to prove a good farmer; a man who would worthily succeed him at Biarg when he died, and keep the honour of the family untarnished, and would enlarge the estate.

"Ah! I see," said Thorkel. "A useful man, good and respectable, like yourself. But what about Grettir?"

Asmund hesitated a moment before answering; but presently he said, "I hardly know what to say of him. He is unruly, sullen, makes no friends, and he has been a constant cause of vexation to me."

Thorkel answered, "That is a bad prospect; however, let him come with me to Thingvalla, and I shall be able to see on the journey of what stuff he is made."

To this Asmund agreed; and right glad was Grettir to think he was to go to the great law-gathering.

Thorkel had sixty men with him, and he rode in some state; for, as already said, he was a great man. The way led over the great desolate waste, called the Two-days-ride; but as on this expanse there were few halting-places, the grass most scanty, and not sufficient to allow of a stay, the party rode across it down to the settled lands nearer the coast as quickly as they could, and reached Fleet-tongue in time to sleep; so they took the bridles off their horses, and let them graze with their saddles on. Their road had lain among the lakes, from which issued the

rivers that united above Biarg. In each lake floated a pair of swans. Often they heard the loud hoarse cry of the great northern diver; but there was hardly any grass, for the moor lies high, is swept by the icy blasts from the glacier mountains to the south, and is made up of black sand. Before them all day had stood towering into the sky the Eyreksjökull, a mountain with perfectly precipitous sides of black basalt, domed over with glittering ice. It resembles an immense bridecake. At one place this mountain in former times had gaped, and poured forth a fiery stream of lava that ran to the lakes, and for a while converted them to steam. One can still see whence this great fiery river issued from the mountain. Little did Grettir think then as he passed under it, a boy of fourteen, that, for the three most lonely, wretched years of his life, that great glacier-crowned mountain was to be the one object on which his eye would rest.

The men were all very tired after their long ride, and they slept till late next morning, lying about on the scant herbage, around a fire made of the roots

of trailing willows that they had dug out of the sand.

When they awoke many of the horses had strayed, and some had rolled in the sand, burst their girths and shaken off their saddles. But they could not have gone any great distance, for they were all hobbled. In Iceland thick woollen ropes are put round the legs of the horses, below the hocks, and twisted together into a knot with a knuckle-bone. This serves as a secure hobble, and the wool being soft does not gall the skin.

It was customary in those days for every one to take his own provisions with him, and most of those who went to the great assize carried meal-bags athwart their saddles. Grettir found his horse at last, but not his meal-bag, which had come off, and was lost; for the saddle was turned under the belly of his cob.

The horses could not have strayed far, not only because they were hobbled, but also because the Tongue where they had been turned loose was a narrow strip of land between two rivers; but then



the slope was considerable in places, and the meal-bag might have rolled down into the water.

As Grettir was running about hunting for his bag, he saw another man in the same predicament. What is more, he saw that the rest of the party, impatient to get on their way, would tarry no longer for them, and were defiling down the hill to cross the river.

Grettir was in great distress. Just then he saw the man run very directly in one course, and at the same moment Grettir saw something white lying under a mass of lava. It was towards this that the fellow was running. Grettir ran towards it also. It was a meal-sack. The man reached it first, and threw it over his shoulder.

"What have you got there?" asked Grettir, coming up panting.

"My meal-sack," answered the fellow.

"Let me look at it," said Grettir. "It may be mine, not yours. Let me look before you appropriate it."

This the man refused to do.

Grettir's suspicion was confirmed, and he made a

catch at the sack, and tried to drag it away from the fellow.

"Oh, yes!" sneered the man—who was a servant at a farm called The Ridge, in Waterdale, and his name Skeggi,—"Oh, yes! you Middlefirthers think you will have everything your own way."

"That is not it," answered Grettir. "Let each man take his own. If the sack be yours, keep it; if mine, I will have it."

"It is a pity Audun is not here," scoffed the serving-man, "or he would trip up your heels and throttle you, as he did on the ice when golfing."

"But as he is not here," retorted Grettir, "you are not like to get the better of me."

Skeggi suddenly took his axe by the haft and hewed at Grettir's head. Grettir saw what he was at, and instantly put up his left hand and caught the handle below where Skeggi's hand held it; wrenched it out of his grasp, and struck him with it, so that his skull was cleft. The thing was done in a moment, and Grettir had done it in self-preservation and without premeditation. He was but a

boy of fourteen, and this was a full-grown stout churl.

Grettir at once seized the meal-bag, saw it was his own, and threw it across his saddle. Then he rode after the company. Thorkel Krafla rode at the head of his party, and he had no misgiving that anything untoward had taken place.

But, when Grettir came riding up with his meal-bag, the men asked him if he had left Skeggi still in search of his. Grettir answered in song:

"A rock Troll did her burden throw
Down on Skeggi's skull, I trow.
O'er the battle-ogress saw I flow
Ruby rivers all aglow.
She her iron mouth a-gape
Did the life of Skeggi take."

This sounds like nonsense; to understand it one must have a notion of what constituted poetry in the minds of Icelanders and Northmen. With them the charm of poetry consisted in never calling anything by its right name, but using instead of it some far-fetched similitude or periphrasis. Thus—the

burden of the rock Troll is iron. The Troll is the spirit of the mountain, and the heaviest thing found in the mountain is iron. The battle-ogress is the axe which bites in battle. The verses that the Norse poets sang were a series of conundrums, and the hearers puzzled their brains to make out the sense. This time they soon understood what Grettir meant, and the men turned and went back to the Tongue, and there found Skeggi dead.

Grettir went on to Thorkel, and in few words, and to the point, told how things had fallen out. He was not the aggressor. He had merely defended himself.

Thorkel was much troubled, and he told Grettir that he might either come on to the assize or go home; that this act of man-slaughter would be investigated at the law-gathering, and judgment given upon it.

Grettir agreed to go on, and see how matters would turn out for him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOOM-DAY.

THAT evening they arrived at Thingvalla.

The great plain of Thingvalla is entirely composed of lava. At some remote period before Iceland was colonized a beautiful snowy cone of mountain, called "The Broad Shield," poured forth a deluge of molten rock, which ran in a fiery river down a valley for some miles, half-choking it up, and then spread out over a wide plain where anciently there had been a great lake. Then all cooled, but after the cooling, or whilst it was in process, there came a great crack, crack. The great mass of lava must have been poured over some subterranean caverns; at any rate the whole plain snapped and sank down a good many feet, the lava becoming cracked and starred like glass. Nowadays, one cannot cross the plain because it is all traversed with these fearful cracks, chasms the bottom of which is filled with black water. Where the plain sank deepest there

water settled and formed the beautiful Thingvalla Lake.

At the side of one of the cracks where the plain broke off and sank is a very curious pinnacle of black rock, and this was called the Hanging Rock, as criminals were hung from it over the chasm.

In one place two of the cracks unite, and there is a high mound of blistered lava covered with turf and flowers between them. That is called the Law Hill, because the judge and his assessors sat there, and no one could get to them, nor could the accused get away across the chasms.

Now it was the law at this time in Iceland that when any man had been killed his nearest relatives came to the assize, and the slayer appeared by proxy and offered blood-money—that is to say, to pay a fine to the relations, and so patch up the quarrel. But if they refused the money then they were at liberty to pursue and kill him. There were no police then. If the relations wanted to have the criminal punished they must punish him themselves.



Upon this occasion the case was discussed in the court on the finger of rock between the two chasms, the people standing on the further sides of these gulfs, listening, but unable to come a step nearer; and Thorkel appeared for Grettir and offered to pay the blood-money. The relations of the dead Skeggi, after a little fuss, agreed to accept a certain sum, and Thorkel at once paid it. But the court ordered that, as Grettir had acted with undue violence, and as there was no evidence except his word that Skeggi had made the first attack, he should be outlawed, and leave Iceland for three winters. If he set his foot in Iceland till three winters had passed, his life was forfeit. He was allowed a moderate and reasonable time for finding a ship that would take him out of the country.

When the assize was over all rode home, and the way that Thorkel and Grettir went was up the valley that had been half-choked with the lava that rolled down from Broad Shield. They came to a small grassy plain with a gently-sloping hill rising out of it, a place where games took place, the women

sitting up the slope and watching the men below. Here Grettir is said to have heaved an enormous stone. The stone is still shown, and I have seen it. I also know that Grettir never lifted it; for it has clearly been brought there by a glacier. But this is an instance of the way in which stories get magnified in telling. No doubt that Grettir did "put" there some big stone, and as it happened that at this spot there was a great rock standing by itself balanced on one point, in after days folks concluded that this must have been the stone thrown by Grettir.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOYAGE.

GRETTIR, then, was doomed by the court to leave his native land whilst only a boy, and remain in banishment for three years—that is to say, till he was eighteen. He was not over sorry for this, as he was tired of being at home, and he wanted to see the world.

There was a man called Haflid who had a ship in which he intended to sail that autumn to Norway, and Asmund sent to him to ask him to take Grettir out with him.

Haflid answered that he had not heard a good account of the boy, and did not particularly wish to have him in his boat; but he would stretch a point, because of the regard he had for old Asmund, and he would take him.

Grettir got ready to start; but Asmund would not give him much wherewith to trade when abroad, except some rolls of home-made wadmall, a coarse felty cloth, and a stock of victuals for his voyage. Grettir asked his father to give him some weapon; but the old man answered that he did not trust him with swords and axes, he might put them to a bad use, and it would be better he went without till he had learned to control his temper and keep a check on his hand.

So Grettir parted from his father without much love on either side; and it was noticed when he left home that, though there were plenty of folks

ready to bid him farewell, hardly anyone said that he hoped to see him come home again—a certain token that he was not liked by those who had seen most of him. But indeed he had taken no pains to oblige anyone and obtain the regard and love of anyone.

His mother was an exception. She went along the road down the valley with him, wearing a long cloak; and when they were alone, at some distance from the house, she halted and drew out a sword from under her cloak, and handing it to Grettir, said: "This sword belonged to grandfather, and many a hard fight has it been in, and much good work has it done. I give it to you, and hope it may stand you in good stead."

Grettir was highly pleased, and told his mother that he would rather have the sword than anything else that could be given him.

Hafiid received Grettir in a friendly manner, and he went at once on board; the ship's anchor was heaved, and forth they went to sea.

Now, directly Grettir got on board he looked

about for a place where he could be comfortable, and chose to make a berth for himself under a boat that was slung on deck; then he put up his wadmall, making a sort of felt lining or wall round against the wind and spray, leaving open only the side inwards, and inside he piled his provisions and whatever he had; then he lay down there and did not stir from his snuggery. Now, it was the custom in those days for every man who went in a ship to help in the navigation; but Grettir would not only do nothing, but from his den he shouted or sang lampoons—that is, spiteful songs, making fun of every man on board. They were not good-natured jokes, but bitter, stinging ones.

Naturally enough the other men were annoyed, and they were not slow to tell Grettir what they thought of him. He made no other reply than a lampoon.

After the ship had lost sight of land a heavy sea was encountered, and unfortunately the vessel was rather leaky and hardly seaworthy in dirty weather. The weather was squally and very cold, so that the men suffered much. Moreover, they had to bale

out the water from the hold, and this was laborious work. They had not pumps in those days.

The gale increased, and the crew and passengers had been engaged for several days and nights in baling without intermission, but Grettir would not help. He lay coiled up in his wadmall under the boat, peering out at the men and throwing irritating snatches of song at them. This exasperated them to such an extent that they determined to take him and throw him overboard. Haflid heard what they said, and he went to Grettir and reproached him, and told him what was menaced.

"Let them try to use force if they will," said Grettir. "All I can say is that I sha'n't go overboard alone as long as my sword will bite."

"How can you behave as you do?" said Haflid. "Keep silence at least, and do not madden the men with your mockery and sneers."

"I cannot hold my tongue from stabbing," said Grettir.

"Very well, then, stab on, but stab me."

"No; you have not hurt me."

"I say, stab me. Then, if the fellows hear you sing or say something spiteful of me, and I disregard it, they will not mind so much the ill-natured things you say of them."

Grettir considered a moment, and then, remembering that he had heard of something ridiculous that had once occurred to Haflid, he composed a verse about it and shouted it derisively at Haflid as he walked away.

"Just listen to him," said Haflid to the men. "Now he is slandering and insulting me. He is an ill-conditioned cur, so ill-conditioned that I will not stoop to take notice of his insolence. And if you take my advice you will disregard him as I do."

"Well," said the men, "if you shrug your shoulders and pay no regard to his bark, why should we?"

So Haflid, by his tact, smoothed over this difficulty, and averted a danger from Grettir's head.

The weather slowly began to mend, and the sun shone out between the clouds; but the wind was still strong, and the leak gained on the ship, for her bottom was rotten. Now that the sun shone, the

poor women who had been aboard and under cover during the gale, crawled forth and came to the side where the boat was, and where was a little shelter, and there sat sewing; whilst Grettir still lay, like a dog in his hutch, within. Then the men began to laugh, and say that Grettir had found suitable company at last—he was not a man among men, but a milksop among women. This was turning the tables on him, and this roused him. Out he came crawling from his den, and ran aft to where the men were baling, and asked to be given the buckets. The way in which it was done was for one to go down into the hold into the water, and fill a tub or cask and hoist it over his head to another man, who carried it up on deck and poured it over the bulwarks. Grettir swung himself down into the hold, and filled and heaved so fast that there had to be two men set to carry up the baling casks, and then two more, four in all attending to him. At one time he even kept eight going, so vigorously did he work;—but then he was fresh, and they exhausted.

When the men saw what a strong, active fellow

Grettir was, they praised him greatly, and Grettir, unaccustomed to praise, was delighted and worked on vigorously, and thenceforth was of the utmost assistance in the ship.

They still had bad weather, thick mist, in which they drifted and lost their bearings, and one night unawares they ran suddenly on a rock, and the rotten bottom of the ship was crushed in. They had the utmost difficulty in rescuing their goods and getting the boat ready; but fortunately they were able to put all the women and the loose goods into the boat, man her, and row off before the ship went to pieces. They came to a sandy island, ran the boat ashore, and disembarked in the cold and wet and darkness.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RED ROVERS.

ONE morning, after a night of storm on the coast of Norway, the servants ran into the hall of a wealthy bonder, named Thorfin, to tell him that

during the night a ship had been wrecked off the coast, and that the crew and passengers were crowded on a little sandy holm, and were signalling for help.

The bonder sprang up and ran down to the shore. He ordered out a great punt from his boat-house, and jumping in with his thralls, rowed to the holm to rescue those who were there.

These were, I need not tell you, the crew and passengers of Haflid's merchant vessel. Thorfin took the half-frozen wretches on board his boat and rowed them to his farm, after which he returned to the islet and brought away the wares. In the meantime his good housewife had been lighting fires, preparing beds, brewing hot ale with honey to sweeten it, and making every preparation she could think of for the sufferers.

Haflid and the rest of the merchants or chapmen who had sailed with him remained at the farm a week, whilst the women were recovering from the cold and exposure and their goods were being dried and sorted. Then they departed, with many thanks

for the hospitality shown them, on their way to Drontheim.

Grettir, however, remained. Thorfin, the master of the house, did not much like him. He did not ask him to stay; but then he had not the lack of hospitality to bid him depart. In the farm Grettir never offered to lend a hand in any of the work; he never joined in conversation, he sat over the fire warming himself, and ate and drank heartily.

Thorfin was much abroad, hunting or seeing after the wood-cutting, and he often asked Grettir to come with him. But he was granted no other answer than a shake of the head and a growl. Now the bonder was a merry, kindly-hearted fellow, and he liked to have all about him cheerful. It is no wonder, then, that Grettir, morose and indolent, found no favour with him.

Yule drew near, and Thorfin busked him to depart, with a number of his attendants, to keep the festival at one of his farms distant a good day's journey. His wife was unable to accompany him, as his eldest daughter was ill and needed careful nursing. Grettir

he did not invite, as his sullenness would have acted as a damper on the joviality of the banquet.

The farmer started for his house where he was going to spend Yule some days before. A large company of guests were invited to meet him, so he took thirty serving-men to attend on him and them.

Norway was at this time being brought into order by Earl Erik, who was putting down with a high hand the bands of rovers who had been the terror of the country. He had outlawed all these men, and that meant that whoever killed them could not be fined or punished in any way for the slaying. Now Thorfin, the farmer with whom Grettir was staying, had been very active against these rovers, and they bore him a grudge. Among the worst of them were two brothers, Thorir wi' the Paunch and Bad Ogmund. They had not yet been caught, and they defied the power of the Earl. They robbed wherever they went, burned farms over the heads of the sleeping inmates, and with the points of their spears drove the shrieking victims back into the flames when they attempted to escape.

Christmas Eve was bright and sunny, and the sick girl was sufficiently recovered to be brought out to take the air on the sunny side of the great hall, leaning on her mother's arm.

Grettir spent the whole day out of doors, not in the most amiable mood at being shut out from the merry-makings, and left to keep house with the women and eight dunderheaded churls. He fed his discontent by sitting on a headland watching the boats glide by, as parties went to convivial gatherings at the houses of their friends. The deep blue sea was speckled with sails, as though gulls were plunging in the waters. Now a stately dragon-ship rolled past, her fearful carved head glittering with golden scales, her sails spread like wings before the breeze, and her banks of oars dipping into the sea and flashing as they rose. Now a wherry was rowed by laden with cakes and ale, and the boatmen's song rang merrily through the crisp air.

The day began to decline, and Grettir was on the point of returning to the farm, when the strange proceedings of a craft at no great distance attracted

his attention. He noticed that she stole along in the shadows of the islets, keeping out of sight as much as possible. Grettir could make out of her just this much, that she was floating low in the water, and was built for speed. As she stranded the rowers jumped on the beach. Grettir counted them, and found they were twelve, all armed men. They burst into Thorfin's boat-house, thrust out his punt, and in its place drew in their own vessel, and pulled her up on the rollers.

Mischief was a-brewing—that was clear. So Grettir went down the hill, and sauntered up to the strangers, with his hands in his pockets, kicking the pebbles before him.

"Who is your leader?" he asked curtly.

"I am. What do you want with me?" answered a stout coarse man—"Thorir, whom they nickname 'wi' the Paunch.' Here is my brother Ogmund. I reckon that Thorfin knows our names well enough. Don't you think so, brother? We have come here to settle a little outstanding reckoning. Is he at home?"

"You are lucky fellows," laughed Grettir, "coming here in the very nick of time. The bonder is away with all his able-bodied and fighting men, and won't be back for a couple of days. His wife and daughter are, however, at the farm. Now is your time if you have old scores to wipe off; for he has left all his things that he values unprotected, silver, clothing, ale, and food in abundance."

Thorir listened, then turning to Ogmund he said, "This is as I had expected. But what a chatterbox this fellow is, he lets out everything without being asked questions."

"Every man knows the use of his tongue," said Grettir. "Now, follow me, and I will do what I can for you."

The rovers at once followed. Then Grettir took fat Thorir by the hand and led him to the farm, talking all the way as hard as his tongue could wag. Now the housewife happened at the time to be in the hall, and hearing Grettir thus talking, she was filled with surprise, and called out to know whom he had with him.

"I have brought you guests for Yule," said Grettir. "We shall not keep it in as dull a fashion as we feared. Here come visitors uninvited, but merry, uncommon merry."

"Who are they?" asked the housewife.

"Thorir wi' the Paunch and Ogmund the Bad, and ten of their comrades."

Then she cried out: "What have you done? These are the worst ruffians in all Norway. Is this the way you repay the kindness Thorfin has shown you in housing and keeping you here, without it's costing you anything?"

"Stay your woman's tongue!" growled Grettir. "Now bestir yourself and bring out dry clothes for the guests."

Then the housewife ran away crying, and her sick daughter, who saw the house invaded by ill-looking men all armed, hid herself.

"Well," said Grettir, "as the women are too scared to attend on you, I will do what is necessary; so give me your wet clothes, and let me wipe your weapons and set them by the fire lest they get rusted."

"You are a different fellow from all the rest in the house."

"I do not belong to the house. I am a stranger, an Icelander."

"Then I don't mind taking you along with us when we go away."

"As you will," answered the young fellow; "only mind, I don't behave like this to every one."

Then the freebooters gave him their weapons, and he wiped the salt water from them, and laid them aside in a warm spot. Next he removed their wet garments, and brought them dry suits which he routed out of the clothes-chests belonging to Thorfin and his men.

By this time it was night. Grettir brought in logs and faggots of fir branches, and made a roaring fire that filled the great hall with ruddy light and warmth. In those days the halls were long buildings with a set of hearths running down the middle, and benches beside the fires.

"Now, then, my men," said Grettir, "come to the table and drink, for I doubt not you are thirsty with long rowing."

"We are ready," said they. "But where are the cellars?"

"Oh, if you please, I will bring you ale."

"Certainly, you shall attend on us," said Thorir.

Then Grettir went and fetched the best and strongest ale in Thorfin's cellars, and poured it out for the men. They were very tired and thirsty, and they drank eagerly. Grettir did not stint them in meat or drink, and at last he took his place by them, and recited many tales that made them laugh, he also sang them songs; but they were becoming fast too tipsy to rack their brains to find out the meaning in the poetry.

Not one of the house-churls showed his face in the hall that evening; they slunk about the farm, in the stables and sheds, frightened and trembling.

Then said Thorir: "I'll tell you what, my men. I like this young chap, and I doubt our finding another so handy and willing. What say you all to our taking him into our band?"

The pirates banged their drinking-horns on the

table in token of approval. Then Grettir stood up and said:

"I thank you for the offer, and if you are in the same mind to-morrow morning when the ale is no longer in your heads, I will strike hands and go with you."

"Let us drink brotherhood at once," shouted the rovers.

"Not so," said Grettir calmly. "I will not have it said that I took advantage of you when you were not sober. It is said that when the wine is in the wit is out."

They all protested that they would be of the same mind next morning, but Grettir stuck to his decision. They were now becoming so tipsy that he proposed they should go to bed.

"But first of all," said he, "I think you will like to run your eyes over Thorfin's storehouse where he keeps all his treasures."

"That we shall!" roared Thorir, staggering to his feet.

Then Grettir took a blazing firebrand from the

hearth, and led the way out of the hall into the night.

The storehouse was detached from the main buildings. It was very strongly built of massive logs, firmly mortised together. The door also was very solid, and the whole stood on a strong stone basement, and a flight of stone steps led up to the door. Adjoining the storehouse was a lean-to building divided off from it by a partition of planks.

The sharp frosty air of night striking on the faces of the revellers increased their intoxication, and they became very riotous, staggering against each other, uttering howls and attempting to sing.

Drawing back the bolt Grettir flung the door open, and showed the twelve rovers into the treasury; and he held the flaming torch above his head and showed the silver-mounted drinking-horns, the embroidered garments, the rich fur mantles, gold bracelets, and bags filled with silver coins obtained from England. The drunken men dashed upon the spoil, knocking each other over and quarrelling for the goods they wanted.

In the midst of this noise and tumult Grettir quietly extinguished the torch, stepped outside and ran the bolt into its place; he had shut them all—all twelve, into the strong-room, and not one of them had his weapons about him.

Then Grettir ran to the farm door and shouted for the housewife. But she would not answer, as she mistrusted him; and no wonder, for he had seemed to be hand and glove with the pirates.

"Come, come!" shouted Grettir, "I have caught all twelve, and all I need now are weapons. Call up the thralls and arm them. Quick! not a moment must be lost."

"There are plenty of weapons here," answered the poor woman, emerging from her place of concealment. "But, Grettir, I mistrust you."

"Trust or no trust," said Grettir, "I must have weapons. Where are the serving-men? Here, Kolbein! Swein! Gamli! Rolf! Confound the rascals, where are they skulking?"

"Over Thorfin's bed hangs a great barbed spear," said the housewife. "You will also find a sword

and helmet and cuirass. No lack of weapons, only pluck to wield them is needed."

Grettir seized the casque and spear, girded on the sword and dashed into the yard, begging the woman to send the churls after him. She called the eight men, and they came up timidly—that is to say, four appeared and took the weapons, but the other four, after showing their faces, ran and hid themselves again, they were afraid to measure swords with the terrible rovers.

In the meantime the pirates had been trying the door, but it was too massive for them to break through, so they tore down the partitions of boards between the store and the lean-to room at the side. They were mad with drink and fury. They broke down the door of the side-room easily enough, and came out on the platform at the head of the stone steps just as Grettir reached the bottom.

Thorir and Ogmund were together. In the fitful gleams of the moon they seemed like demons as they scrambled out, armed with splinters of deal they had broken from the planks and turned into

weapons. The brothers plunged down the narrow stairs with a howl that rang through the snow-clad forest for miles. Grettir planted the boar-spear in the ground and caught Thorir on its point. The sharp double-edged blade, three feet in length, sliced into him and came out between his shoulders, then tore into Ogmund's breast a span deep. The yew shaft bent like a bow, and flipped from the ground the stone against which the butt-end had been planted. The wretched men crashed over the stair, tried to rise, staggered, and fell again. Grettir trod on Thorir, wrenched the spear out of him, and then running up the steps cut down another rover as he came through the door. Then the rest came out stumbling over each other, some armed with bits of broken stick, others unarmed, and as they came forth Grettir hewed at them with the sword, or thrust at them with the spear.

In the meantime the churls had come up, armed indeed, but not knowing how to use the weapons, and in a condition of too great terror to use them to any purpose. The pirates saw that they were

being worsted, and their danger sobered them. They went back into the room and ripped the planks till they had obtained serviceable pieces, and then came two together down the stair, warding off Grettir's blows with their sticks, and not attempting to strike. Then they forced him back and allowed space and time for those behind to leap down to the ground. If then they had combined they might have recovered the mastery, but they did not believe that they were assailed by a single enemy, they thought that there must have been many; consequently those who had leaped from the platform, instead of attacking Grettir from behind, ran away across the farmyard, and those who were warding off his blows, finding themselves unsupported, lost heart, and leaped down as well and attempted to escape. The yard was full of flying frightened wretches, too blinded by their fear to find the gate, and in the wildness of their terror they climbed or leaped over the yard wall and ran towards the boat-house. Grettir went after them. They plunged into the dark boat-shed, and possessed themselves of the

oars, whilst some tried to run their boat down into the water. Grettir followed them in the gloom, smiting to right and left. The bewildered wretches in the darkness hit each other, stumbled and fell in the boat, and some wounded went into the water.

The thralls, content that the pirates had cleared out of the yard, did not trouble themselves to pursue them, but went into the farmhouse. The good woman in vain urged them to go after and succour Grettir. They thought they had done quite enough. It is true, they had neither killed nor wounded anyone, but they had seen some men killed. So Grettir got no help from them. He was still in the boat-house, and he had this advantage: the boat-house was open to the air on the side that faced the sea, whilst the further side was closed with a door, consequently Grettir was himself in shadow. But the moon shone on the water, and he could see the black figures of the rovers cut sharply against this silver background. So he could see where to strike, whilst he himself was unseen.

One stroke from an oar reached him on the

shoulder, and for the moment numbed his arm; but he speedily recovered sensation, and killed two more of the ruffians; then the remaining four made a dash together, past him, through the door, and separating into pairs, fled in opposite directions. Grettir went after one of the couples and tracked them to a neighbouring farm, where they dashed into a granary and hid among the straw. Unfortunately for them most of the wheat had been thrashed out, so that only a few bundles remained. Grettir shut and bolted the door behind him, then chased the poor wretches like rats from corner to corner, till he had cut them both down. Then he opened the door, and cast the corpses outside.

In the meanwhile the weather was changing, the sky had become overcast with a thick snow fog that rolled up from the sea, so that Grettir, on coming out, saw that he must abandon the pursuit of the remaining two. Moreover, his arm pained him, his strength was failing him, and a sense of overpowering fatigue stole over him.

The housewife had placed a lamp in a window of



a loft as a guide to Grettir in the fog; the stupid house-thralls could not be induced by her to go out in search of him, and she was becoming uneasy at his protracted absence. The fog turned into small snow, thick and blinding, and Grettir struggled through it with difficulty, as the weariness he felt became almost overpowering. At last he reached the farm and staggered in through the door. He could hardly speak. He went to the table, took a horn of mead, drank some, and then threw himself down among the rushes on the floor by the fire, full armed grasping the sword, and in a moment was asleep.

He did not wake for twelve hours; but the cautious and prudent housewife had sent out the carles in search of the pirates. The dead bodies were found, some in the yard, some in the boat-house; then Grettir woke and came to them and pointed out in what direction the only remaining two had run. The snow had fallen so thick that their traces could not be followed, but before night-fall they were discovered, dead, under a rock where



they had taken refuge; they had died of cold and loss of blood. All the bodies were collected and a great cairn of stones was piled over them.

When they had been buried, then the housewife made Grettir take the high seat in the hall, and she treated him with the utmost respect, as he deserved.

Time passed, and Thorfin prepared to return home; he dismissed his guests, and he and his men got into their boat to return home. No tidings had reached him of the events that had happened whilst he had been away. The first thing he saw as he came rowing to his harbour was his punt lying stranded. This surprised and alarmed him, and he bade his men row harder. They ran to the boat-house, and then saw it occupied by a vessel, on the rollers, which there was no mistaking; he knew it well, it belonged to those redoubted pirates Thorir and Ogmund. For a moment he was silent with the terror and grief that came on him. "The Red Rovers!" he said, when he recovered the stunning sense of alarm. "The Red Rovers are here—they

are on my farm. God grant they have not hurt my wife and daughter!"

Then he considered what was to be done, whether it was best to go at once to the farm, or to make a secret approach to it from different quarters, and surprise the enemy.

Grettir was to blame. He ought not to have allowed Thorfin to be thus thrown into uncertainty and distress. He had seen the master's boat round the headland and enter the bay, but he would neither go himself to meet him on the strand, nor suffer anyone else to go.

"I do not care even if the bonder be a bit disturbed at what he sees," said the young man.

"Then let me go," urged the wife.

"You are mistress, do as you like," said Grettir bluntly.

So the housewife and her daughter went down towards the boat-house, and when Thorfin saw them he ran to meet them, greatly relieved but much perplexed, and he clasped his wife to his heart and said, "God be praised that you and my child are

safe! But tell me how matters have stood whilst I have been away, for I cannot understand the boat being where I found it."

"We have been in grievous peril," answered his wife. "But the shipwrecked boy whom you sheltered has been our protector, better than a dozen men."

Then he said, "Sit down on this rock by me and tell me all."

They took each other by the hand and sat on a stone; and the attendants gathered round, and the housewife told them the whole story from beginning to end. When she spoke of the way in which the young Icelander had led the tipsy rovers into the storehouse and fastened them in, without their swords, the men burst into a shout of joy; and when her tale was concluded, their exultant cries rang so loud that Grettir heard them in the farmhouse.

Thorfin said nothing to interrupt the thread of his wife's story; and after she had done he remained silent, rapt in thought. No one ventured to disturb

him. Presently he looked up, and said quietly, "That is a good proverb which says, 'Never despair of anyone.' Now I must speak a word with Grettir."

Thorfin walked with his wife to the farm, and when he saw Grettir he held out both his hands to him, and thanked him.

"This I say to you," said Thorfin, "which few would say to their best of friends—that I hope some day you may need my help, and then I will prove to you how thankful I am for what you have done. I can say no more."

Grettir thanked him, and spent the rest of the winter at his house. The story of what he had done spread through all the country, and was much praised, especially by such as had suffered from the violence of the Red Rovers. But Thorfin made to Grettir a present, in acknowledgment of what he had done; and that present was the sword that had hung above his bed, with which Grettir had killed so many of the rovers. Now, concerning this sword a tale has to be told.

CHAPTER VII.

THE STORY OF THE SWORD.

SOME little while before the slaying of the Red Rovers, a strange event had taken place.

Grettir had made the acquaintance of a man called Audun, who lived at a little farm at some distance from the house of Thorfin, and he walked over there occasionally to sit and talk with his friend. As he returned late at night he noticed that a strange light used to dance at the end of a cliff that overhung the sea, at the end of a headland; a lonely desolate headland it was, without house or stall near it. Grettir had never been there, and as it was so bare, he knew that no one lived on that headland, so he could not account for the light. One day he said to Audun that he had seen this strange light, which was not steady but flickered; and he asked him what it meant.

Audun at once became very grave, and after a moment's hesitation said, "You are right. No one

lives on that ness, but there is a great mound there, under which is buried Karr the Old, the forefather of your host Thorfin; and it is said that much treasure was buried with him. That is why the ghostly light burns above the mound, for—you must know that flames dance over hidden treasure."

"If treasure be hidden there, I will dig it up," said Grettir.

"Attempt nothing of the kind," said Audun, "or Thorfin will be angry. Besides, Karr the Old is a dangerous fellow to have to deal with. He walks at night, and haunts all that headland and has scared away the dwellers in the nearest farms. No one dare live there because of him. That is why the Ness is all desolate without houses."

"I will stay the night here," said Grettir, "and to-morrow we will go together to the Ness, and take spade and pick and a rope, and I will see what can be found."

Audun did not relish the proposal, but he did not like to seem behindhand with Grettir, and he reluctantly agreed to go with him.

So next day the two went out on the Ness together. They passed two ruined farmhouses, the buildings rotting, the roofs fallen in. Those who had lived in them had been driven away by the dweller in the old burial mound, or barrow. The Norse name for these sepulchral mounds is *Haug*, pronounced almost like How; and where in England we have places with the names ending in *hoe*, there undoubtedly in former times were such mounds. Thus, in Essex are Langenhoe and Fingringhoe, that is to say the Long Barrow and Fingar's How. Also, the Hoe, the great walk at Plymouth above the sea, derives its name from some old burial mound now long ago destroyed.

The Ness was a finger of land running out into the sea, and on it grew no trees, only a little coarse grass; at the end rose a great circular bell-shaped mound, with a ring of stones set round it, to mark its circumference. Grettir began to dig at the summit, and he worked hard. The day was short, and the sun was touching the sea as his pickaxe went through an oak plank, into a hollow space beneath, and he knew at once that he had struck

into the chamber of the dead. He worked with redoubled energy, and tore away the planks, leaving a black hole beneath of unknown depth, but which to his thinking could not be more than seven feet beneath him. Then he called to Audun for the rope. The end he fastened round his waist, and bade his friend secure the other end to a pole thrown across the pit mouth. When this was done, Audun cautiously let Grettir down into the chamber of the dead.

Now, you must know that in heathen times what was often done with old warriors was to draw up a boat on the shore, and to seat the dead man in the cabin, with his horse slain beside him, sometimes some of his slaves or thralls were also killed and put in with him, and his choicest treasures were heaped about him. This men did because they thought that the dead man would want his weapons, his raiment, his ornaments, his horse and his servants in the spirit world. Of late years such a mound has been opened in Norway, and a great ship found in it, well preserved, with the old dead chief's bones

in it. When a ship was not buried, then a chamber of strong planks was built, and he was put in that, and the earth heaped over him. Into such a chamber had Grettir now dug.

He soon reached the bottom, and was in darkness, only a little light came in from above, through the hole he had broken in the roof of the cabin or chamber. His feet were among bones, and these he was quite sure were horse bones. Then he groped about.

As his eyes became more accustomed to the darkness, he discerned a figure seated in a throne. It was the long-dead Karr the Old. He was in full harness, with a helmet on his head with bull's horns sticking out, one on each side; his hands were on his knees, and his feet on a great chest. Round his neck was a gold torque or necklet, made of bars of twisted gold, hooked together behind the head. Grettir in the dark could only just make out the glimmer of the gold, but it seemed to him that a phosphorescent light played about the face of the dead chief.

So little light was left, that Grettir hasted to collect what he could. There stood a brazen vessel near the chair, in which were various articles, probably of worth, but it was too dark for Grettir to see what they were. He brought the vessel to the rope and fastened the end of the cord to its handle. Then he went back to the old dead man and drew away a short sword that lay on his lap, and this he placed in the brass vessel. Next he began to unhook the gold torque from his neck, and as he did this the phosphorescent flame glared strangely about the dead man's face.

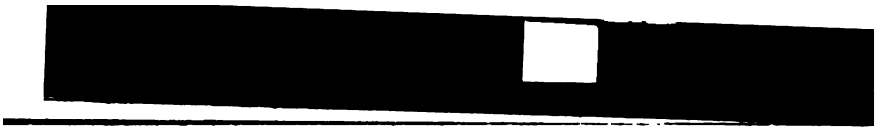
Then, all at once, as both his hands were engaged undoing the hook behind Karr's neck, he was clipped. The dead man's arms had clutched him, and with a roar like a bull Karr the Old stood up, holding him fast, and now all the light that had played over his features gathered into and glared out of his eyes.

When Audun heard the roar, he was so frightened that he ran from the barrow, and did not stay his feet till he reached home, feeling convinced that the



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GRETTIR REMOVES THE SWORD OF KARR THE OLD.



ghost or whatever it was that lived in the tomb had torn Grettir to pieces.

Then began in the chamber of the dead a fearful wrestle. Grettir was at times nigh on smothered by the gray beard of the dead chief, that had been growing, growing, in the vault, ever since he had been buried.

How long that terrible struggle continued no one can tell. Grettir had to use his utmost force to stand against Karr the Old. The two wrestled up and down in the chamber, kicking the horse bones about from side to side, stumbling over the coffer, and the brass vessel, and the horse's skull, striking against the sides, and when they did this then masses of earth and portions of broken plank fell in from above.

At last Karr's feet gave way under him and he fell, and Grettir fell over him. Then instantly he laid hold of his sword, and smote off Old Karr's head and laid it beside his thigh.

This, according to Norse belief, was the only way in which to prevent a dead man from walking, who

had haunted the neighbourhood of his tomb, and in the Icelandic sagas we hear of other cases where the same proceeding was gone through. The Norsemen held to something more dreadful than ghosts walking; they thought that some evil spirit entered into the bodies of the dead, that when this happened the dead no longer decayed, but walked, and ate, and drank, and fought, very much like living ruffians, but with redoubled strength. Then, when this happened, nothing was of any avail save the digging up of the dead man, cutting off his head and laying it at his thigh.

When Grettir had done this, he despoiled Karr the Old of his helm, his breast-plate, his torque, and he took the box on which the feet had rested. He fastened all together to the rope, and called to Audun to haul up. He received no answer, so he swarmed up himself, and finding that his friend had run away he pulled up what he had tied together, and carried the whole lot in his arms to the house of Thorfin. Thorfin and his party were at supper; and when Grettir came in, the bonder looked up, and

asked why he did not keep regular hours, and be at the table when the meal began. Grettir made no other answer than to throw all he carried down on the supper-table before the master. Thorfin raised his eyebrows when he saw so much treasure.

"Where did you get all this?" he asked.

Then Grettir answered in one of his enigmatical songs:

"Thou who dost the wave-shine shorten,
My attempt has been to find
In the barrow what was hidden,
Deep in darkness black and blind.
Nothing of the dragon's treasure
With the dead is left behind."

By the wave-shine shortener he meant Thorfin; the dragon's treasure meant gold, because dragons were thought to line their lairs with that metal.

Thorfin saw that Grettir's eye looked longingly at the short sword that had lain on the knees of Karr. He said: "It was a heathen custom in old times to bury very much that was precious along with the dead. I do not blame you for what you have done; but this I will say, that there is no one else about

this place who would have ventured to attempt what you have done. As for that sword on which you cast your eyes so longingly, it has ever been in our family, and I cannot part with it till you have shown that you are worthy to wear it."

Then that sword was hung up over Thorfin's bed. You have heard how Grettir did show that he was worthy to wear it, and also how Thorfin gave it him.

Now, this tale about the sword will very well illustrate what was said at the beginning, that the history of Grettir contains, in the main, truth; but that this substance of truth has been embroidered over by fancy. What is true is, that during the winter in which he was with Thorfin he did dig into the mound in which Karr was buried, and did take thence his treasures and his sword. But all the story of his fight with the dead man was added. The same story occurs in a good many other sagas, as in that of Hromund Greip's son, who also got a sword by digging into a barrow for it. When the history of Grettir was told, and this adventure of his

was related, those who told the story imported into it the legend of the fight of Hromund in the grave with the dead man, so as to make the history of Grettir more amusing. As you will see by the tale, no one else was present when it happened, for Audun had run away, and it was not like Grettir to boast of what he had done. This was an embellishment added by the story-teller, and from the story-teller the incident passed into the volume of the story-writer.

Grettir had now two good swords; one long, which he called Jokull's Gift, that he had received from his mother, and this short one that he wore at his girdle, which he had taken out of the grave of Karr the Old, and which he had won fairly by his bravery in the defence of the house and family of Thorfin.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE BEAR.

WHEN spring came, then Grettir left his friend Thorfin, and went north along the Norwegian coast, and was everywhere well received, because the story of how he had killed twelve rovers, he being as yet but a boy, was noised through all the country, and every one who had anything to lose felt safer because that wicked gang was broken up. Nothing of consequence is told about him during that summer. For the winter he did not return to Thorfin as asked, but accepted the invitation of another bonder, named Thorgils.

Thorgils was a merry, pleasant man, and he had a great company in his house that winter. Among his visitors was a certain Biorn, a distant cousin, a man whom Thorgils did not like, as he was a slanderous-tongued fellow, and moreover he was a braggart. He was one of those persons we meet with not infrequently who cannot endure to hear another

praised; who, the moment a good word is spoken of someone, immediately puts in a nasty, spiteful word, and tells an unkind story, so as to drag that person down in the general opinion. At the same time, concerning himself he had only praiseworthy and wonderful feats to relate about his wit, his wisdom, his craft, his knowledge of the world, about his strength and courage.

Thorgils knew how much, or rather how little, to believe of what Biorn said, and he did not pay much regard to his talk. But now Grettir had an opportunity of seeing and of feeling how mistaken had been his conduct on board the ship upon which he had come to Norway, when he made lampoons on the sailors and chapmen, and stung them with sharp words. He saw how disagreeable a fellow Biorn was, how much he was disliked, and by some despised; and he kept very greatly to himself and out of Biorn's way. He did not wish to quarrel with him, because he was the relative of his host, and he was afraid that his anger would get the better of him if he did come to words with the braggart.

Grettir had grown a great deal since he left Iceland, and he was now a strapping fellow, broad built but not short. He was not handsome, but his face was intelligent.

It fell out that a bear gave much trouble that winter to Thorgils and the neighbouring farmers. It was so strong and so daring that no folds were secure against it, and Thorgils and the other farmers endured severe losses through the depredations of Bruin.

Before Yule, a party was formed to go in search of and kill the bear, but all that was done was to find the lair.

The bear had taken up his abode in the face of a tremendous cliff that overhung the sea. There was but one path up to the cave, and that was so narrow that only one man could creep along it at a time. Moreover, if his foot slipped he would be flung over the edge upon the rocks or skerries below against which the waves dashed.

When the den of the bear had been discovered, Biorn said, "That is the main thing. Now I know

where the rogue lies, I'll settle with him, trust me. I've been the death of scores of bears. My only dread is lest he be afraid of me, and will not come on."

And, actually, Biorn went out on several moonlit nights to watch for the bear. He saw that the only way to deal with him would be to stop the track from the den, and fight him as he attempted to come away. He took his short sword and great shield with him covered with ox-hide, and one night he laid himself down on the path of the bear, and put his shield over him. He thought that Bruin would come smelling at the great hide-covered shield, and then all at once he (Biorn) would spring up and drive his sword into the heart of the bear. That was his plan—and not a bad plan—only, unfortunately for Biorn, the bear did not come out for a long time. He had got an inkling that a man was watching for him, so he was shy, and whilst he waited before venturing forth, Biorn, who had been drinking pretty freely that evening, went to sleep.

Presently the bear came out, crept cautiously down the narrow track, snuffing about, and when he came to Biorn, he plucked with his claws at the shield, and with one wrench had it off and tumbled it down the cliff.

Biorn woke with a start, rose to his knees, saw the huge bear before him, and in a moment turned tail, and ran as hard as he could run to Thorgils' house, and was too scared to be able to boast that he had killed or wounded the bear.

Next morning his shield was found where the bear had thrown it, and much fun did this adventure of the braggart occasion. This made him very irritable and more spiteful than ever.

Thorgils now said that really something must be done to rid the neighbourhood of the bear, so a party of eight set out well armed with spears; of this party were Biorn and Grettir. They reached the point where the track to the den ran up the cliff to the lair, and one man after another tried it. But there was no getting at the bear; for as soon as a man came near the beast put his great forepaws

forth and caught and snapped the spear-heads or beat them down. As already said, only one could crawl up at a time.

Grettir had gone out that day in a fur coat that his friend Thorfin had given him, and which he greatly valued. When the onslaught against the bear began, he took off his fur coat, and folded it, and put it on a stone. Biorn saw this, and, when none observed, he took the fur coat and threw it into the cave of the bear. Grettir did not see what had been done till the party, disappointed with their want of success, made ready to depart, when he missed it, and then some suspicion entered his head as to what had been done with it, and by whom, but he said nothing.

As they walked home, Biorn began to taunt Grettir with having done nothing all day. He could kill robbers who were unarmed and were drunk, perhaps asleep, but a bear was too serious an adversary for him.

Grettir said nothing, but as his gaiter thong became broken, he stopped and stooped to mend it.

Thorgils asked if they should wait for him. Grettir declined.

"Oh," said Biorn, "it is all nonsense. It is a pretence. He means to have all the glory of fighting the bear alone when we have gone on."

He said the truth, but he had no idea when he spoke that it was the truth.

Grettir tarried till the party had crossed a hill and was out of sight, then he turned and went back to the bear's den. He slipped his hand through the loop at the end of the handle of his short sword that he had taken from the grave of Karr the Old, and let it hang on his wrist, but he held the long sword, Jokull's gift, by the pommel. His plan was to use the long sword if needed, but if the bear came to close quarters he would throw it down and grasp the short one without having to put his hand to his girdle for it. Very cautiously he crept along the path. Bruin saw him, and was now angry and hungry, and came down to meet him. The bear was somewhat above him; Grettir halted, and the bear stood up growling on his hind-legs.

At once the long sword was whirled and fell on the right wrist above the paw, and cut it off. The bear immediately fell down on all-fours; but the amputated paw was on the side away from the wall of rock, and when he went down on the stump he was overbalanced, and came down with his whole weight on Grettir.

Grettir let fall his long sword at once, and with both hands grasped the brute's ears, and held his head off lest he should get a bite at him. Grettir, in after years, was wont to say that this was the hardest tussle he had in his life—it was even worse than anything he had to do with the rovers. For if the beast had but been able to nip him on the breast, or shoulder, or face with his great fangs, all would have been up with him. Moreover, the ears were so smooth that he had to do his utmost not to let them slip. Grettir had the wit to drag back the brute's head to the rock, and by so doing the bear could not use his only uninjured fore-leg, armed with terrible claws, which would have ripped Grettir's clothes and flesh.

In the struggle the two went over the edge, and for a moment Grettir thought, as they spun in the air, that he was lost. But the bear was heavier than the lad, consequently he fell crash on the rocks at the bottom first, and Grettir on him, breaking Grettir's fall by his great body. The bear's back was broken.

Then Grettir got up, shook himself, left the bear, went up the path and found his fur coat torn to tatters, and he put it about him, recovered also his long sword, and took the cut-off paw of the bear.

He now went back to Thorgils' house, and when he came into the hall where the fires were blazing, every one laughed to see him in his tattered coat; but when he gave the paw of the bear to Thorgils the general merriment exchanged to surprise. Biorn, however, could not contain himself for vexation, and launched forth some coarse jest that made Grettir's blood tingle in his veins.

"Do not listen to him," said Thorgils. "You are a brave fellow, and there are not many your like." Then turning to Biorn, he said, "Kinsman, I advise and warn you to keep a civil tongue in your head,

or you will come to rue it, and have to be taught better manners."

"Oh, if I am to learn manners from Grettir, that is sending me to a cub indeed!"

"I want to know," said Grettir, "whether you threw my fur coat into the den?"

"I am not afraid of saying that I did."

"Will you give me another in its place?"

"I have not the smallest intention of doing charity to beggars."

The braggart knew that Grettir was restraining himself because he did not wish to quarrel with his host's kinsman, and he took advantage of his knowledge. But Thorgils was greatly distressed and ashamed, and he said to Grettir:

"Pay no attention to his words. He has insulted you, and I will pay you a fine in compensation for his insult, that it may be buried and forgotten."

That was customary then. When one had hurt another in body or in honour by blow or foul word, he was bound to pay a sum of money; if he did not,

then the man injured was required by the laws of honour to revenge the injury.

But when Biorn heard this proposal, he shouted out that he would not suffer the matter to be so compromised; he was not ashamed of his words. Thorgils drew Grettir aside, and said to him that his kinsman was a badly-behaved, brutal fellow, but that he hoped Grettir would not take up the quarrel in his house; and Grettir promised him solemnly that he would not attempt to take revenge for the rudeness of Biorn so long as they were both inmates of his house.

"As for what may happen between you later," said Thorgils, "I wash my hands of responsibility. If Biorn is offensive to those who have never hurt him, he must take the consequences."

So matters remained; only that Biorn, presuming on his position, became daily more arrogant, intolerable, and abusive, so that Grettir had to exercise daily self-restraint to keep his hands off him. And glad he was when spring came, that he might get away to another part of Norway.

As for Biorn, he went in the summer to England in a ship that belonged to Thorgils, trading there for Thorgils and for himself. Consequently, all that summer he and Grettir did not meet.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SLAYING OF BIORN.

GRETTIR left Thorgils very good friends, and he went with some merchants to the north, but when the summer was over he came back south, and arrived at a little island in the entrance of the Drontheim firth. His intention was to see Earl Sweyn, and perhaps take service under him; but if so, things fell out other than he had reckoned. For, as he was in this island, there came in a large merchant vessel from England, and Grettir and those with him at once went to see the shipmen, and among them was Biorn. The ship was, in fact, that of Thorgils, and it was laden with commodities bought in England, or obtained by exchange for the wool, and furs,



and women's embroidery sent out in the spring by Thorgils.

Directly Biorn saw Grettir he turned red, and pretended not to recognize him; but Grettir went to him at once and said:

"Now has come the time when we two can settle our differences."

"Oh," said Biorn, "that is soon done. I don't object to paying a trifle."

"The time for paying is over," said Grettir. "Thorgils offered an indemnity for your insolence, and you refused to consent to it."

Then Biorn saw that there was no help for him but that he must fight. So he girded him for the conflict, and he and Grettir went down on the sand, and they fought.

The fight did not last long. Grettir's sword cut him that he fell and died.

When the news reached Thorgils, he got ready, and came by boat as fast as he could to see the earl at Drontheim. He found the earl very angry, but he said to him:



"I am a kinsman of the fallen man, and I know that he treated Grettir with intolerable insolence, and that he refused every compromise. Then remember what a benefit has been done to the country by Grettir, who ridded it of the Red Rovers, Thorir wi' the Paunch and Ogmund the Bad."

Thorfin also came to Drontheim when he heard of the straits into which Grettir had come through killing Biorn. The earl called a council on the matter, and said he would not come to a decision till he had heard what Biorn's brother Hiarandi had to say on the matter. Hiarandi was a violent man, and he was very wroth. He would hear of no patching up of the matter, and he vowed he would not, as he expressed it, "bring his brother into his purse." As already said, it was customary when a man had been killed to offer a sum of money to the next of kin, and if he accepted the money the quarrel was at an end. When we now speak of "pocketing an injury," reference is made to this same ancient usage, by which every offence was estimated at so much money, and if the wronged

man took money for the offence committed against him, he was said *to pocket it.* When the earl went into the matter, and heard how Grettir had been wronged and outraged by Biorn, he gave his decision that Grettir had not acted contrary to law, and that Biorn had justly forfeited his life. Thorfin offered the sum of money which the earl considered was sufficient to atone to the relations for the death of Biorn, but Hiarandi refused absolutely to touch it.

Then Thorfin knew that Grettir's life was in danger, for Hiarandi would certainly try to take it; so he begged his kinsman Arinbiorn to go about with Grettir, and keep on the look-out against the mischief that threatened.

Now it fell out one day that Grettir and Arinbiorn were walking down a street in Drontheim when their way led before a narrow lane opening into it. They did not see any danger in the way, and were unaware of this lane. But just as they had passed it a man jumped out from behind, in the shadow, swinging an axe, and he struck at Grettir between the shoulder-blades. Fortunately, Arin-



biorn had looked round at the lane, and he saw the man leap out, so he suddenly dragged Grettir forward with such a jerk that Grettir fell on his knee. This saved his life, for the axe came on his shoulder-blade, made a gash that cut to his armpit, and then the axe buried itself in the roadway. Instantly Grettir started to his feet, turned round, and with his short sword smote in the very nick of time as the man, who was Hiarandi, was pulling up his axe to cut at Grettir again. Grettir's sword fell on his upper arm near the shoulder, and cut it off. Then out rushed some servants of Hiarandi on Arinbiorn and Grettir, who set their backs against a house-wall and defended themselves with such valour that they killed or put to flight all who had assailed them.

Now, this had been a base and cowardly attempt on the life of Grettir, and Hiarandi richly deserved his fate. But the earl was exceedingly angry when he heard the news, and he called a council together. Thorfin and Grettir attended, and the earl angrily charged Grettir with having committed great vio-

lence, and being the cause of the death of Hiarandi and some of his servants.

Grettir acknowledged this; but showed his wound, and stated how he had been attacked from behind; how his life had been saved by the promptitude of Arinbiorn, and how he had but defended himself against enemies who sought his life.

"I wish you had been killed," said the earl, "and then there would have been an end to these disorders."

"You would not have a man not raise his hands to save his head?" said Grettir.

"I see one thing," exclaimed the earl. "Ill luck attends you, and you are doomed to commit violences wherever you are."

The end of it was that Earl Sweyn said he would not have Grettir to live in Norway any longer, lest he should be the cause of fresh troubles. But he remained over the third winter, and next spring sailed for Iceland, the time of his outlawing being ended.

CHAPTER X.

OF GRETTIR'S RETURN.

WHEN Grettir came back to Biarg, he found his father so old and infirm as to be no more able to stir abroad, and Atli managed the farm for him along with Illugi, Grettir's youngest brother, now grown up to be a big boy. Grettir was now aged eighteen, but he looked and was a man. Illugi was about fifteen, a gentle, pleasant boy. He and the kindly, careful Atli were as unlike Grettir as well could be; they avoided quarrels, they had a civil word for every one, and took pains to make themselves agreeable, whether to guests in their house, or when staying anywhere, to their hosts. Grettir never troubled himself to be courteous or to be obliging to anyone. Now that he was back from Norway he was rather disposed to think much of himself as a man more brave and audacious than his fellows, for, had he not killed twelve rovers, broken into a barrow, slain a bear, and been the

death of one man in a duel, and another who had attempted to assassinate him? Atli did not much like his manner, and cautioned him not to be overbearing whilst at home, lest he should involve himself in fresh troubles. But words were wasted on Grettir. He was not the fellow to listen to advice, but one of those men who must learn the bitter lessons of life by personal experience. It is so with men always. Some, who are thoughtful, see what God's law is which is impressed on all society, and listen to what others have found out as the lessons taught them by their lives, so they are able to go out equipped against the trials and difficulties of life. But others will neither look nor listen, and such have to go through every sort of adversity, till they have learned the great truths of social life, and perhaps they only acquire them when it is too late to put them in practice.

It is with laws and courtesies of life as with the three R's. A man will fare badly who cannot read, write, and cipher. If he learns these accomplishments as a child, he does well; he is furnished for

the struggle of life, and starts on the same footing as other men; but if as a child he is morose and indifferent, and refuses to learn, then all through his life he is met with difficulties, owing to his ignorance, and he finds that he *must* learn to read, write, and do sums; and he has to acquire these in after years with much less ease than he might have learnt as a child, and after he has lost many chances of getting on which might have been seized, had he known these things before.

Grettir's temper on his return may be judged by one incident that happened almost directly. He had not forgotten his struggle on the ice with his cousin Audun, and he was resolved to have another trial of strength with him. So he had not been home many days before he rode over the hill to Audunstead in his best harness, and with a beautiful saddle on his horse that had been given him by Thorfin. The time was that of hay, and he saw the field round Audun's farm full of rich grass, ready to be cut. He took the bridle off his horse and turned it into Audun's meadow. This was not out of

thoughtlessness, but out of insolence, and was intended to exasperate Audun. In Iceland grass grows very little, and only fit to be cut for hay round the farms in what is called the *tun*, where it is richly dressed with stable-dung. Consequently hay is very scarce and very precious. The grass never grows much longer than one's fingers, and so even in the tun it is not plentiful. He knocked at the door of the farm and asked for his cousin, and was told that Audun had gone to the highland *sel* to fetch curds, and would be back later. The *sel* was a farm on the highland, only occupied in summer, when the cattle were driven to the moors and hills to feed on the grass there, and to save that in the lowlands against winter.

Here a word or two must be said about Icelandic names of places and people. When Iceland was colonized, those who first settled in the land and built farms, called the places after their own names in a great many cases; they called them so-and-so's *stead*, or so-and-so's *by* or farm. A *by* is the Scotch byre, and in Icelandic is *bær*, pronounced exactly

like the Scotch word. Wherever, in the north and east of England, Norse settlers came, there we find names of places ending in the same way, and we know that these were farms and dwellings of old Norse settlers. Thus in Northumberland, Yorkshire, and Lincolnshire, are plenty of Norse place-names. Near Thirsk is Thirkelby or Thorkel's-byre, near Ripon is Enderby or Andrew's-byre. Not only so, but where there are high hills there we find also *sels*, that is summer-farms, like the Alps to which the cattle are driven in Switzerland. Next as to the names of people. What is a little puzzling to remember is the number of persons whose names begin with Thor. Thor, the god of thunder, was regarded with the highest reverence by the Icelanders; they thought of him even more than they did of Odin, the chief god of all, who had one eye, and his one fiery eye was the sun. Thor was called the Red-beard, and the aurora borealis was thought to be his waving red-beard in the sky. The thunderbolt they regarded as his hammer. To show their respect for him, children were named after him: Thor-grim

means Thor's wrath; Thor-kel, Thor's kettle, in which the sacrificial meat was cooked in offering to Thor; Thor-gil was Thor's boy or servant; Thor-hall was Thor's flint spear-head, and so on. The Northumbrian king, St. Osmund, takes his name from the Hand of God, and the name is the same as Asmund, the father of Grettir. Oswald means the elect of the god; in Icelandic the name would be Aswald.

When Grettir found that Audun was from home, he went into the hall and lay down on the bench nearest the door. The hall was dark.

The halls of the Icelandic chiefs were like bodies of churches, and were divided into a nave with side aisles; and were lighted by windows in a clere-story that were covered with the skin of the lining of a sheep's stomach, to let in light and keep out cold, because they had no glass. In the side aisles were the beds of those who lived in the house, some with doors and shutters, which could be fastened from within; and a man in danger of his life would so sleep. He would go to bed, and then close himself

in and lock the shutters, that no one could get at him when he was asleep. The fires and benches and tables were in the nave, or middle of the great hall. Over the partitions for the beds were hung shields and swords and spears, and on grand occasions hangings were put up all along the sides, hiding the beds and berths in the side aisles. The arrangement in an Icelandic house at the present day is much the same, only on a very much reduced scale. The people live and eat and sleep in the same room, like the saloon-cabin of a ship, with the berths round the walls.

Audun arrived in the afternoon with a horse that carried curds in skins on its back; that is to say, skins were made into bottles, as is still common in Palestine. When he saw that a horse with a saddle on it was wandering about in his meadow, trampling down the grass and eating it, he was very vexed; and throwing one bottle of curd over his back, and hanging another in front on his breast to counterbalance it, he ran into the house to ask who had done this.

The hall was dusky, and Audun's eyes were accustomed to the bright summer-light. As he entered, Grettir put out his foot; Audun did not see it, and stumbled over it, fell on the skin of curds and burst it. Then he jumped up, very angry, and asked who had played him this scurvy trick. Grettir named himself, and said he had come over about that matter of the wrestle on the ice. Audun, still very irate, all at once stooped, picked up the burst skin, and dashed it in Grettir's face, smothering him with curds. Then he threw down the other curd-bottle, and began to wrestle with Grettir. They swung up and down the hall, kicking over the benches, now upon the floor, then on the stone-paved fire-hearth in the midst; then they crashed against the walls and pillars of the bed-chambers, and as they did so the shields and weapons hung over them clashed like bells. Some frightened servant-maids came in, and ran out again in alarm, calling for aid.

Audun felt now that Grettir had outgrown him in strength, but he would not give in; then they slipped on the curd and both fell, parted for a

moment, rose, and flew at each other once more. Again, up and down, banging, stumbling, writhing in each other's arms, twisting legs round each other, to try to trip each other up, and ever Grettir bearing Audun backwards, but never wholly mastering him. Audun could not trust his cousin, for though they were akin, and though he had not really done him an injury, there was no telling to what a pitch Grettir's blood might mount and blind him; so as they wrestled, Audun took care to twist the short sword out of Grettir's belt and throw it away. As, to do this, he had to disengage his hand from Grettir's shoulder, he lost an advantage. Grettir managed to trip him, and throw him flat on his back.

At that moment, fortunately, a man, big, wearing a red kirtle, and in full harness, entered the hall and asked what was the meaning of the noise and fight? As he did not receive an immediate answer, he came to the rescue of Audun, and drew Grettir from him.

"We are only in play with each other," said Grettir.

"Rather rough play," said the man, "and likely to end in tears rather than laughter."

"Who are you that interfere?" asked Grettir.

"My name is Bard."

Then Audun scrambled to his feet.

"What is the reason of this rough play?" asked Bard.

Then Grettir answered, by singing:

"Prithee, Audun, will you say
How, upon the ice one day,
You to throttle did essay?
Now, for that I this have done,
On Audun honour I have won;
Curds and wrestle make good fun."

"Oh, I see," said Bard; "fighting out an old grudge. I have nothing to say against that. Now, shake hands, and be loving cousins again."

Audun held out his hand, and Grettir agreed to let the matter end thus. But he was dissatisfied, and ever after bore Bard a grudge. However, he never again wrestled with Audun, and remained on good terms with him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HORSE-FIGHT

ONE of the rude and cruel sports that amused the Icelanders in summer time was horse-fighting. A smooth piece of turf was chosen, and was staked round. Into this inclosure two or sometimes more horses were introduced, and a man attended each, who urged on his own horse, armed with a goad. By means of these goads the horses were stung to madness, and attacked each other, biting each other savagely. Now, Atli had a beautiful roan, with a black mane, which he and his old father were very proud of. Lower down the valley, near the sea, was a farm called Mals, in which lived a bonder named Kormak, and his brother; they had in their house a man called Odd the Foundling, a sly, captious fellow, who, like Grettir, made verses; but his verses were not generally thought to be so good as those of Grettir. On the opposite side of the river is a hot-spring; it is still hot, but not so hot as it



was in those days, when it boiled up and poured forth a cloud of steam, and ran in a scalding rill down to the river. There was a convenient level place near the river for a horse-fight, and it stood above the water on one side rather steeply, so that it needed only fencing on three sides. Kormak had a brown horse that fought well, and it was resolved that autumn to have a fight between the horse of Kormak and the roan of Atli. Odd was to goad on Kormak's brown, and Grettir offered himself to his brother to run with the roan. Atli did not much like the proposal, as he feared Grettir's temper; but he could not well decline his offer, so he said, "I will consent, brother; only I pray you, be peaceable, for we have to do with overbearing men, and it will be very unfortunate if a broil should come of this."

"If they begin, I shall not run away," said Grettir.

"Not if they begin; but be very careful not to provoke a quarrel."

"Quarrels come and are not made," said Grettir.

"That I do not hold," answered Atli.



The day of the horse-fight arrived, and the horses were led to the place of contest. They had been fed up and groomed for the occasion, and each had a band round his middle of colour, by which he who went with the horse could hold, and the goad of each was tied with a tuft of feathers at the head, stained the same colour as the belt about the horse.

The two horses were introduced within the inclosure, and were soon goaded into anger, and began to plunge, and snort, and snap at each other. The by-standers outside the railing cheered and shouted, and the horses seemed to understand that they were to do their best; so they pranced about each other, struck at each other, and tried to get round each other so as to bite the flank. At one moment the roan bit the side of the brown, and held. Odd ran his goad into the horse of Grettir to make it let go; —this was against the rules; he did it to save his own horse from a terrible wound. Grettir saw what he did, but he said nothing. Now the horses bore towards the river, and were rearing and plunging close to the edge, and the two men had much ado to hold

on. Then Odd took the opportunity when Grettir's back was turned to drive at him with his goad between the shoulders, where was the great scar still red, and only just fully healed, that he had received from the axe of Hiarandi. It was a cruel blow, and this also was against all rule of fair play.

At that moment the roan reared, and instantly Grettir ran under him, and struck Odd with such a blow that he reeled back towards the water edge, and in so doing dragged the brown horse he was holding over the edge, and both went down into the water together. The river was very full with the melted snows, and Odd was brought ashore with difficulty. It was found that three of his ribs were broken; but whether with the blow dealt by Grettir, or by his fall on the rock, or by the hoof of the horse as it fell and struggled in the river, cannot be said; but the party of Kormak, of course, charged Grettir with having broken Odd's ribs with his stick, and they flew to arms, and threatened the party from Biarg. However, the people of the nearest vales and firths interfered, and no bloodshed ensued. But

the men of Mals and of Biarg separated bearing each other much ill-will, each charging the other with having broken the laws of the sport.

Atli did not say what he felt, he was greatly annoyed; but Grettir was less careful of his words, he said that the matter was by no means ended, and that he hoped there would be a meeting between the men of Mals and the men of Biarg, and then—it would not be a fight of horses, but of men; not a biting of horses, but of sharp blades.

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE FIGHT AT THE NECK.

THE next fiord on the west of that into which the river that flowed past Biarg poured was called the Ramsfirth, and at the head of it lived Grettir's married sister.

In the following summer, that is in 1014, Grettir paid his sister a visit; he had with him two servant-men from Biarg, and he spent three days and nights

at his sister's. Whilst there, news reached him that Kormak, who had been away from Mals for a week or two, was on his road home, and who was now staying at a house called Tongue. Grettir at once made ready to depart, and his brother-in-law sent two men with him, for it was not safe that Grettir should have only two churls with him, as there was ill blood between him and Kormak about that affair of the horse-fight.

A high, long shoulder of desolate moor lies between the Ramsfirth and the Westriver-dale, in which is a confluent of the river that flows past Biarg. This shoulder rises to the north into a great hump, called Burfell, and on the saddle is a little lake. A very fine view is obtained from this shoulder of moor over the northern immense bay of Hunafloi, towards the glaciers and mountains of that curious excrescence of land that lies on the north-west of Iceland. I know exactly the road taken by Grettir on this occasion, for I have ridden over it. Along the top of this shoulder the rocks are scraped by glaciers, that must at one time have occupied the whole

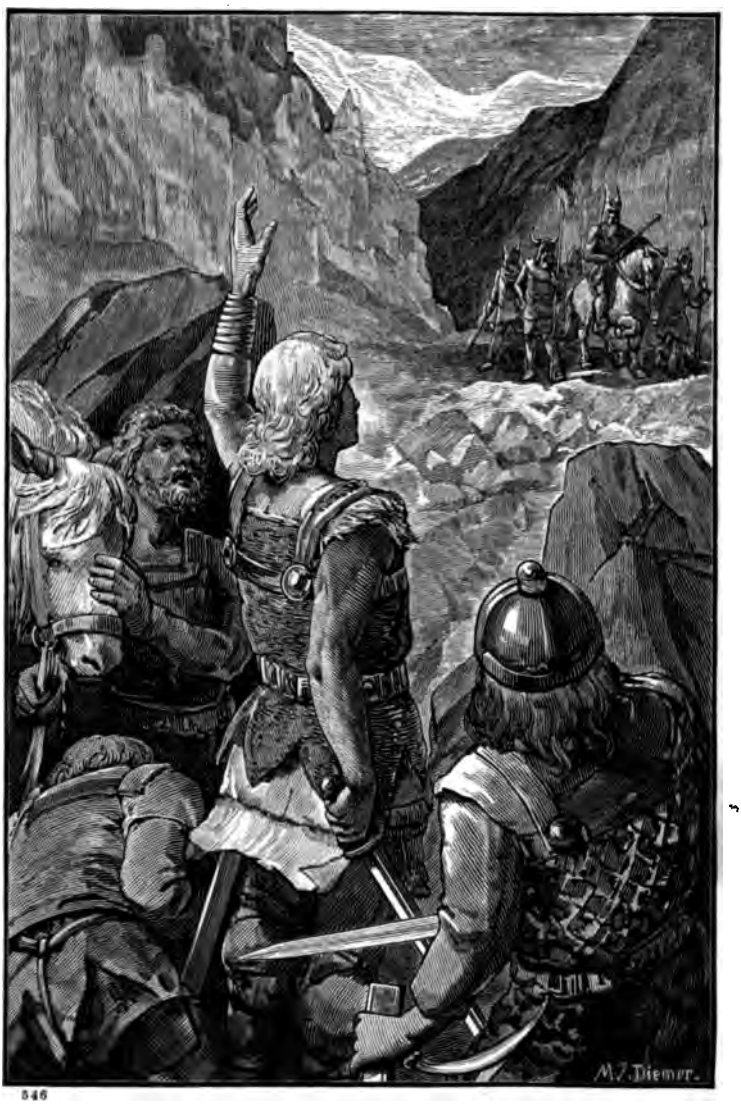
centre of the island, and have slowly slidden down into the firths on all sides. Here, what is curious is, that the rocks are furrowed, just as if carved with a graving tool, in lines from south to north, showing the direction from which the glaciers slipped down. Now, on the slope of this bit of upland is a great stone poised on a point, which I have seen. Grettir came to this stone, and spent a long time in trying to upset it. It is called Grettir's-heave to this day. The men who were with him rather wondered at him why he wasted time over this, instead of pushing on. But his sharp eye had noticed the party of Kormak leaving Tongue, and he was bent on an encounter. He thought that if Odd had seen him going over the hill he would make a lampoon about him running away from his sister's house the moment he heard that danger was threatening. So he determined to tarry till Kormak came up and fight him. He had not long to wait, for presently over the top of the hill came Kormak with Odd and some others. Grettir at once rode to meet them, and said, "Now we have our weapons on both sides, let

us fight like men of good birth, and not with sticks as churls."

Then Kormak turned to his men and bade them accept the challenge and fight.

Accordingly they ran at one another and fought. Grettir bade his two serving-men stand behind his back and defend that, and he, sweeping his long-sword from left to right, went forward against Kormak. Thus they fought for a while, and some were wounded on both sides.

Now it so happened that at a rich farm in the Ramsfirth-dale lived a well-to-do, and very strong man, called Thorbiorn—that is, Thor's Bear—nick-named Oxmain. He had ridden that day over Burfell-heath, with a party, and was now returning. As he came along he heard shouts and the clashing of arms, so he quickened his pace, and presently came in sight of the fighters. He at once ordered his men to dash in between the combatants. But by this time the passions of those engaged were so furious that they would not be separated. Grettir sweeping his long-sword about him strode for-



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GRETTIR CHALLENGES KORMAK AND HIS PARTY.



ward, and the men of Kormak fell back before him. Down went two of those who were with Kormak, and one servant of Atli, Grettir's brother, was killed.

Then Thorbiorn Oxmain raised his great voice and roared out, that he and his party would take sides against the first man who dealt another blow. Grettir saw that it would hardly do if Thorbiorn Oxmain brought all his force against him, so he gave up the battle; but they did not part till every one of those engaged was wounded, and two were killed on one side, and one on the other. Grettir was ill pleased that the affray had ended in this manner, and he felt resentment against Oxmain for his interference. Unfortunately, Oxmain's brother, who went by the name of the Slow-coach, made fun of the matter, and laughed about Grettir sneaking away from the fight directly he saw that he was getting the worst of it. Whatever he said was reported at Biarg, and, as may well be imagined, did not improve Grettir's temper, or liking for Oxmain and Slow-coach. Nothing further occurred between him and Kormak, probably he and Kormak were content

with the trial of strength that had taken place, and were disinclined to renew a profitless contest.

Atli took no notice of the loss of his house-churl; he desired peace, and not a stirring afresh of the fires of discord. To his peaceable behaviour it was doubtless due that the quarrel with Kormak came to an end. But the vexation felt by Grettir against Oxmain for his meddlesomeness, and against Slow-coach for his gibes, rankled in his breast.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOW GRETTIR AND AUDUN MADE FRIENDS.

GRETTIR remained through the autumn at Biarg, after the skirmish at the Neck, till September, and then he thought he would ride away east and see Audun again, with whom he had had that little ruffle that was almost a quarrel, and which was fortunately interrupted by the entrance of Bard. Audun was a cousin, though not a near one, and Grettir had no desire that any bad blood should

exist between kinsfolk. Audun belonged to what was called the Madpate family; for it had had in it at least two who had been so odd in their ways that folk said they were not quite right in their minds. The relationship will easily be understood by a look at the pedigree. It will be remembered that old Onund Treefoot, who had settled in Iceland, had to wife secondly Thordis, an Icelandic woman, and his son by her was Thorgrim Grizzlepate, and this Thorgrim bought the estate and house of Biarg about the year 935. Onund Treefoot died in or about 920, and then his widow Thordis married again a man called Audun Skokull, and they had a son who was called Asgeir, who settled in Willowdale, and either went off his head or proved so queer in his ways that folks called him Madpate. This Madpate married and had a son Audun, and a daughter Thurid who married away west into a very good family; and she had a son called Thorstein Kuggson, of whom we shall hear more presently. Audun of Willowdale's son was Madpate the Second, and the lad Audun who wrestled with Grettir and burst the

bottle of curds was the son of this Madpate the Second. Consequently the relationship to Grettir was through Grettir's great-grandmother, and Audun belonged to a generation younger than that of Grettir, because Grettir was the son of Asmund's old age. Moreover, Asmund's father Thorgrim had married somewhat late in life, whereas all the Madpate family had dashed into marriage at a very early age. Thus it came about that Grettir's great-grandmother was Audun's great-great-grandmother, and that, nevertheless, Audun was somewhat older than Grettir.

Grettir rode straight up over the hill behind his house. Now this hill like the Neck, already described, is rather curious, for on it are a number of rocks that have been deposited by glaciers, and not only so, but they have been dragged along by ice, scratching the rocks over which they were driven forward, and so these beds of rock are rubbed and scored with lines made by the stones forced over them by ice. Above Biarg there is one large stone that has scratched a deep furrow in the bed of rock

and then has stopped at the end of the furrow it had itself scored. This remarkable phenomenon tells us of a time when the whole of the centre of Iceland was covered with glaciers, like the centre of Greenland now. These glaciers slided down the slopes of the hills, and were thrust along to the sea, where they broke off and floated away as icebergs.

Nowadays folk in Iceland do not understand these odd stones perched in queer places, which were deposited by the ancient glaciers, and they call them Grettir-taks or Grettir's-heaves. So the farmer at Biarg told me that the curious stone at the end of the furrow in the bed of rock on top of the hill was a Grettir-tak; it had been rubbed along the rock and left where it stands by Grettir. But I knew better. I knew that it was put there by an ancient glacier ages before Grettir was born, and before Iceland was discovered by the Norsemen. I have no doubt that in Grettir's time this stone was said to have been put there by some troll. Afterwards, when people ceased to believe in trolls, they said it was put there by Grettir.

Grettir's ride led him by a pretty little blue lake that lies folded in between high hills and has a stream flowing from it into a very large lake near Hop. But he did not follow the stream down; he crossed another hill, not very steep and high, and reached his cousin's house at Audunstead in Willowdale. Now this valley took its name from the woods of willows that grew in it when first settled, but at the present day none remain; all have in course of time been burnt for fuel, and except for scanty grass the Willowdale is very dreary-looking. We may be sure that Iceland presented a much more smiling and green appearance eight hundred or a thousand years ago than it does at present.

When Grettir came to Willowdale, Audun received him in a friendly manner, and Grettir made him a present of a handsome axe he had. He remained with him some little while, and they talked over old tales of Onund Treefoot and his doings, and every shadow of rivalry and anger disappeared, so that they parted at length in the best of tempers and as true and affectionate cousins.



GRETTIR AND AUDUN TALK OVER OLD TALES.



Audun would have desired to keep Grettir there longer, but Grettir would not stay. He desired to get on to the head of Waterdale, where lived an uncle of his called Jokull, his mother's brother, at a place called Tongue.

So he rode away over the moor, and reached Tongue. Here a stream comes rushing through a gorge in a series of waterfalls, and meets another stream that comes down a valley called the Valley of Shadows further east.

Tongue is so called because it lies on a grassy slope exactly in the tongue of land between these two streams. There is now a good farm there and a church, and there I stayed a few days. At the back of Tongue the hill rises rapidly to a fell called Tongue-heath. This hill was covered with snow when Grettir arrived. This uncle Jokull was glad to see him.

He was a rough and violent man, very big and strong; and it was clear to everyone that his nephew took after his mother's family more than his father's, for there was a strong likeness both in

build and face and in character between Jokull and Grettir.

He received Grettir heartily in his rough, blunt way, and bade him stay there as long as he liked. Jokull had been a seafaring man, and had made much by his merchant trips. He would probably have been a richer and more respected man had he not been so violent and overbearing and ready to pick quarrels.

Now Grettir had not been at Tongue three days before he heard a very strange tale. Jokull's mouth was full of it, and with good reason, for the events had taken place not an hour's ride distant. It was a tale about the nearest farm in the Valley of Shadows, a farm called Thorhall's-stead, which was reported to be haunted; and so serious had affairs become there that no servants would remain, and the farmer and his family had been driven from house and home by the hauntings last winter, and had come and lodged with Jokull at Tongue, and he had entertained them for some two or three months. Now this was not a case of mere fancy

and fantastic fear. It was something very real and very marvellous. But it is a long story, and must be consigned to another chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VALE OF SHADOWS.

WE have come now to an incident which formed a turning-point in Grettir's life. It is a very mysterious and inexplicable story, not one that can be put aside as we have that of his fight in the tomb with Karr the Old. This is a story even more gruesome. It relates to an event that so shook Grettir's nerves that he never after could endure to be alone in the dark, and would risk all kinds of dangers to escape solitude. How much of truth lies under this strange narrative we cannot now say, but that something really did take place is certain from the effect it had on Grettir ever after.

The richest valley for grass in all this quarter of Iceland, and the most peopled, is the Waterdale.

herd who has been with me, a rude, strange man, but afraid of neither man nor hobgoblin, and strong as a bull; but he is not very clear in his intellect."

"That does not matter," said Thorhall, "so long as he can mind sheep."

"You may trust him for that," said Skapti. "He is a Swede, and his name is Glam."

Towards the end of the assize two gray horses belonging to Thorhall slipped their hobbles and strayed; so, as he had no serving-man, he went after them himself, and on his way met a strange-looking fellow, driving before him an ass laden with faggots. The man was tall and stalwart; his face attracted Torhall's attention, for the eyes were ashen gray and staring. The powerful jaw was furnished with white protruding teeth, and about his low brow hung bunches of coarse wolf-gray hair.

"Pray, what are you called?" asked Thorhall, for he suspected that this was the man Skapti had spoken about.

"Glam, at your service."

"Do you like your present duties—wood-cutting?" asked the farmer.

"No, I do not. I am properly a shepherd."

"Then, will you come with me? Skapti has spoken of you and offered you to me."

"What are the drawbacks to your service?" asked Glam cautiously.

"None, save that my sheep-walks are haunted."

"Oh! is that all? Ghosts won't scare me. Here is my hand. I will come to you before winter."

They separated, and soon after the farmer found his horses; they had got into a little wood, and were nibbling the willow tops. He went home, having thanked Skapti.

Summer passed, then autumn, and nothing further was heard of Glam. The winter storms began to bluster up the valley from the cold Polar Sea, driving the flying snowflakes and heaping them in drifts at every turn of the vale. Ice formed in the shallows of the river, and the streams which in summer trickled down the sides were now turned to icicles. I was there the very end of June, and then the

whole of the mountain flank to the west was covered with frozen streams spread like a net of icicle over the black and red striped bare rock.

One gusty night a violent blow at the door startled all in the farm. In another moment Glam, tall and wild, stood in the hall glowering out of his gray staring eyes, his hair matted with frost, his teeth rattling and snapping with cold, his face blood-red in the glare of the fire that glowed in the centre of the hall.

He was well received by Thorhall, but the housewife did not like the man's looks, and did not welcome him with much heartiness. Time passed, and the shepherd was on the moors every day with the flock; his loud and deep-toned voice was often borne down on the wind as he shouted to the sheep, driving them to fold. His presence always produced a chill in the house, and when he spoke it sent a thrill through the women, who did not like him.

Christmas-eve was raw and windy; masses of gray vapour rolled up from the Arctic Ocean, and hung in piles about the mountain tops. Now and

then a scud of frozen fog, covering bar and beam with feathery hoar-frost, swept up the glen. As the day declined snow began to fall in large flakes.

When the wind lulled there could be heard the shout of Glam high up on the hillside. Darkness closed in, and with the darkness the snow fell thicker. There was a church then at Thorhall's farm; there is none there now, since the valley has been abandoned from its cold and ill name.

The lights were kindled in the church, and every snowflake as it sailed down past the open door burned like a golden feather in the light.

When the service was over, and the farmer and his party returned to the house, Glam had not come home. This was strange; as he could not live abroad in the cold, and the sheep would also require shelter. Thorhall was uneasy and proposed a search, but no one would go with him; and no wonder, it was not a night for a dog to be out in, and the tracks would all be buried in snow. So the family sat up all night listening, trembling and anxious.

Day broke at last faintly in the south over the

great white masses of mountains. Now a party was formed to search for the missing man. A sharp climb brought them to the top of the moor above Tongue. Here and there a sheep was found shivering under a rock or half buried in a snowdrift, but of Glam—not a sign.

Presently the whole party was called together about a spot on the hilltop where the snow was trampled and kicked about, and it was clear that some desperate struggle had taken place there. There the snow was also dabbled with frozen blood. A red track led further up the mountain side, and the searchers were following it when a boy uttered a shriek of fear. In looking behind a rock he had come on the corpse of the shepherd lying on its back with the arms extended. The body was taken up and carried to the edge of the gorge, and was there buried under a pile of stones, heaped over it to the height of about six feet. *How* Glam had died, *by whom* killed, no one knew, nor could they make a guess.

Two nights after this one of the thralls who had

gone for the cows burst into the hall with a face blank from terror; he staggered to a seat and fainted. On recovering his senses, in a broken voice he assured those who were round him that he had seen Glam walking past him, with huge strides, as he left the stable door. The shepherd had turned his head and looked at him fixedly from his great gray staring eyes. On the following day a stable lad was found in a fit under a wall, and he never after recovered his senses. It was thought he must have seen something that had scared him. Next, some of the women declared that they had seen Glam looking in on them through a window of the dairy. In the dusk Thorhall himself met the dead man, who stood and glowered at him, but made no attempt to injure his master, and uttered not a word. The haunting did not end thus. Nightly a heavy tread was heard round the house, and a hand groping along the walls, and sometimes a hand came in at the windows, a great coarse hand, that in the red light from the fire seemed as though steeped in blood.

When the spring came round the disturbances lessened, and as the sun obtained full power, ceased altogether.

During the course of the summer a Norwegian vessel came into the fiord; Thorhall went on board and found there a man named Thorgaut, who had come out in search of work. Thorhall engaged him as a shepherd, but not without honestly telling him his trouble, and what there was uncanny about his sheep-walks, and how Glam had fared. The man did not regard this, he laughed, and promised to be with Thorhall at the appointed season.

Accordingly he arrived in autumn, and he soon established himself as a favourite in the house; he romped with the children, helped his fellow-servants, and was as much liked as his predecessor had been detested. He was such a merry careless fellow that he did not think anything of the risks that lay before him, and joked about them.

When winter set in strange sights and sounds began to alarm the folk at the farm, but Thorgaut was not troubled; he slept too soundly at night

to be disturbed by the heavy tread round the house.

On the day before Yule, as was his wont, Thorgaut drove out the sheep to pasture. Thorhall was uneasy. He said to him: "I pray you be careful, and do not go near the barrow under which Glam was laid."

"Don't fear for me," laughed Thorgaut, "I shall be back in time for supper, and shall attend you to church."

Night settled in, but no Thorgaut arrived. There was little mirth at table when the supper was brought in. All were anxious and fearful.

The wind was cold and wetting. Blocks of ice were driving about in the bay, grinding against each other, and the sound could be heard far up the valley. Aloft, the aurora flames were lighting up the heavens with an arch of fire. Again this Christmas night the dwellers in the farm sat up and did not go to bed, waiting for the return of Thorgaut, but he did not arrive.

Next morning he was sought, and was found

lying dead across the barrow of Glam, with his spine and one leg and one arm broken. He was brought home and laid in the churchyard.

Matters now rapidly became worse. Outbuildings were broken into of a night, and their woodwork was rent and shattered; the house door was violently shaken, and great pieces of it were torn away; the gables of the house were also pulled furiously to and fro.

Now it fell out that one morning the only man who remained in the service of the family went out early. Not another servant dared to remain in the place, and this man remained because he had been with Thorhall and with his father, and he could not make up his mind to desert his master in his need. About an hour after he had gone out Thorhall's wife took her milking cans and went to the cow-house that she might milk the cows, as she had now not a maid in the house, and had to do everything herself. On reaching the door of the cow-house she heard a terrible sound from within, the bellowing of the cattle, and the deep bell-notes of an unearthly

voice. She was so frightened that she dropped her pails and ran back to the house and called her husband. Thorhall was in bed, but he rose instantly, caught up a weapon, and hastened to the cow-house.

On opening the door he found all the cattle loose and goring each other. Slung across the stone that separated their stalls was the old serving-man, perfectly dead, with his back broken. He had, apparently, been tossed by the cows, and had fallen on this stone backwards.

Neither Thorhall nor his wife explained his death in this way; they thought that Glam must have been there, have driven the cattle wild, and that just as he had broken the back of Thorgaut, so had he now broken that of the poor old serving-man.

It was impossible for the bonder to remain longer in that place; he and his wife therefore removed down to Tongue, which lies at the junction of the two rivers, and there things were quiet. There he was hospitably received by Jokull. Thorhall was able to persuade some of his runaway servants to

"Now," thought Grettir, "if I can but break his back!" Then drawing Glam to him by the middle, he put his head beneath the chin of his opponent and forced back the head. If he could only drive the head far enough back he would break his neck.

At that moment one or both of the door-posts gave way; down crashed the gable-trees, ripping beams and rafters from their places, frozen clods of turf rattled from the roof and thumped into the snow.

Glam fell on his back outside the door, and Grettir on top of him. The moon was, as I said before, at her full; large white clouds chased each other across the sky. Grettir's strength was failing him, his hands quivered in the snow, and he knew that he could not support himself from dropping flat on the mysterious and dreadful visitant, eye to eye, lip to lip.

Then Glam said: "You have done ill matching yourself with me; now know that never shall you be stronger than you are to-day, and that, to your dying day, whenever you are in the dark you will

see my eyes staring at you, so that for very horror you will not dare to be alone."

At this moment Grettir saw his short sword in the snow, it had slipped from his belt as he fell. He put out his hand at once, clutched the handle, and with a blow cut off Glam's head, and at once laid it beside his thigh.

Thorhall came out at this juncture, his face blanched; but when he saw how the fray had ended, he joyfully assisted Grettir to roll the dead man to the top of a pile of faggots that had been collected for winter fuel. Fire was applied, and soon far down the Waterdale the flames of the pyre startled folks, and made them wonder what new horror was being enacted in the Vale of Shadows.

Next day the charred bones were conveyed a long way—some hours' ride—into the great desert in the interior, and in one of the most lonely spots there a cairn or pile of stones was heaped over them. I have seen this mound, which is still pointed out as that under which the redoubted Glam lies.

And now we may well ask, what truth is there

in the story? That there is a basis of truth can hardly be denied. The facts have been embellished, worked up, but not invented. The only probable explanation of the story is this.

As already said, further up the valley, in a spot difficult to be reached, stood the old fortress of some robbers, with many caves in the sandstone about it very convenient for shelter. Now, it is not improbable that some madman may have taken refuge in this safe retreat, and may have come out at night in search of food, and carried off the sheep of Thorhall. It may be that Glam caught him attempting to steal a sheep, and fought with him, and was killed, and that in like manner Thorgaut was killed. Then when people saw a great wild man wandering about they thought it was Glam, whereas it was the man who had haunted the region before Glam came there, and had killed Glam. This is the simplest and easiest explanation of this wild and fearful tale.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW GRETTIR SAILED TO NORWAY.

EARLY in the spring of the year 1015, news reached Iceland of a change of rulers in Norway. Olaf Harald's son, commonly known as Olaf the Saint, had come to be King of Norway; Earl Sweyn had been defeated in battle and driven out of the country. Now Grettir was remotely connected with the king, that is to say, his father's grandfather was brother to the grandfather of Asta, Olaf's mother. The cousinship was somewhat distant; but in those days folk held to their kin more than they do now. Grettir thought that a good chance had opened to him for doing well in Norway, so he resolved to leave Iceland, and enter the service of his relative, the king. There was a ship bound for Norway lying in Eyjafiord, and Grettir engaged a berth in her, and made ready for the voyage.

Now his father Asmund was very old and feeble, and was well nigh bedridden. He had given over

the entire management of the farm to his eldest son Atli, and to young Illugi, who was a few years younger than Grettir. Atli was everywhere liked, he was such a prudent, peaceable, and kindly man.

Grettir's ill-luck still followed him; for, as it chanced, Thorbiorn, the Slowcoach, the relation of Thorbiorn Oxmain, had resolved to go to Norway also, and in the same ship. Now the Slowcoach may have been overslow in his movements, but he was overnimble with his tongue, and he was strongly advised either not to go in the same boat with Grettir, or, if he did, to mind his words.

Such advice was thrown away on the Slowcoach, who, instead of practising caution, in order to show himself off, began to brag of his strength, and to say scurvy things of Grettir, which were duly reported by tale-bearers to Grettir. Consequently, when Grettir arrived in the Eyjafiord with his goods, he was not very amiably disposed towards the Slowcoach. However Atli had impressed on him the necessity of controlling himself, and Grettir was

resolved not to quarrel with the man unless he could not help it.

At the side of the shore, those who were about to sail had run up booths and cabins for themselves and their stores. Many of those going in the boat were chapmen, and they took with them goods with which to traffic in Norway.

Just as the vessel was ready, and about to sail next day, Slowcoach arrived, slow as usual, and after every one else was ready, and their goods on board. As it was the last evening on shore, all the merchants and seamen were sitting about their booths, when Thorbiorn Slowcoach arrived, and rode along the lane between the wooden cabins. The men shouted to him to know if he had any news to tell them.

Thorbiorn's eye caught that of Grettir, who was sitting on a bench, and he answered, "I don't hear any news, except that the old idiot Asmund of Biarg is dead."

This was not true; the old man was not dead, but very ill. Some of those who heard him said, "That

is sad news indeed, for he was a worthy and honourable old man, and he could ill be spared."

"I don't know that," said Thorbiorn with a scornful laugh.

"But how did he die? What did he die of?"

"Die of?" repeated the Slowcoach loud enough to be heard by Grettir. "Smothered like a dog in the poky little kennel they call their hall at Biarg. As for any loss in him, it is news to me that the world is not well rid of dotards."

"These are ill words," said those who heard him. "No good man will speak slightingly of old and blameless chiefs. Besides, such words as these Grettir will not endure."

"Grettir!" scoffed Thorbiorn. "Before I face him I must see him use his weapons better than he did last summer, when engaged with Kormak. Then I put my elbow between them, and Grettir was but too ready to accept the interference. I never saw a man before so shake in his shoes."

Thereat Grettir stood up, and controlling himself, said, "If I have any faculty of foresight, Slowcoach,

I see that you will not be smothered with smoke like a dog. You should have done other than speak foul words of very aged men. Gray hairs deserve respect."

"I don't think more of your foresight than I do of the wisdom of your old fool of a father," said Thorbiorn.

The end was that they fought. The insult was too gross to be endured, and Grettir felt it incumbent on him to strike for his father's honour. The fight did not last long; the Slowcoach was slow in his fighting, slow of hand, only not slow of tongue, and Grettir's sharp sword wounded him to death.

Slowcoach was buried in the nearest churchyard; and the chapmen gave Grettir credit for having restrained himself as long as possible, and allowed that, according to the ideas of the time, he was justified in fighting and killing the Slowcoach for his spiteful and strife-provoking words. But Grettir was not pleased, he regretted the contest, because he knew that it left occasion of strife behind, which might occasion Atli trouble. Thorbiorn Oxmain

would, he feared, be sure to take up the quarrel, and then Atli would have to pay a heavy fine in silver to atone for the death.

The vessel set sail, and reached the south of Norway. There Grettir took ship in a trading keel, to go north to Drontheim, because he heard that the king was there, and his heart beat high with hopes that Olaf would acknowledge him as a cousin, and would take him into his body-guard, and treat him with honour; and that so, though he had had ill-luck in Iceland, good luck might attend him in Norway.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE HOSTEL BURNING.

THERE lived a man named Thorir at Garth in Iceland who had spent the summer in Norway when Olaf returned from England, and he had stood in great favour with the king. He had two sons, and at this time both were well-grown men.

Thorir left Norway for Iceland, where he broke up

his ship, not intending again to go a seafaring. But when he heard the tidings that Olaf was king over the whole of Norway, then he deemed it would be well for his sons to go there and pay their respects to the king, and remind him of his old friendship for their father.

On reaching Norway much about the same time as had Grettir, they took a long rowing-boat, and skirted the coast on their way north to Drontheim. They preceded Grettir by a few days. On reaching a fine fiord, in which there was shelter from the gales that began to bluster violently with the approach of winter, the sons of Thorir ran in their boat, and as there was a large wooden hostelry there built for the shelter of weather-bound travellers, they took refuge in it, and spent their days in hunting and their nights in revelry.

Now it so fell out that Grettir's merchant ship came into this same fiord one evening and ran aground on the opposite shore to that on which was the hostel. The night was bitterly cold; storms of snow drove over the country, whitening the

mountains. The men from the ship were worn out and numbed with cold, and they had no means of kindling a fire. Then, all at once, they saw a light spring up on the opposite side of the firth, twinkling cheerfully between the trees. This was a sight to make them more eager for a fire, and they began to wish that some one of their number would swim across and bring over a light.

"In the good old times there must have been men who would have thought nothing of swimming across the streak of water at night," said Grettir.

"No comfort to us to know that," said one of the crew. "It does not concern us what may have been in the past, we are shivering in the present. Why do you not get us fire?"

Grettir hesitated. The night was very like that on which he had fought with Glam: the same full moon, with snow-laden clouds rolling over its face for a while obscuring it, and then the full glare falling over the face of earth again; and, unaccountably, a sense of doubt and depression had come over him, as though that evil adversary were now about to

revenge his downfall upon him. He looked round suddenly, for he thought that the fearful eyes were staring at him from out of the black shadows of the fir-wood.

The rest of the crew united in urging him, and at length, reluctantly, Grettir yielded. He flung his clothes off, and prepared himself to swim. He had on him a fur cape, and a pair of wadmal breeches. He took up an iron pot, and jumped into the sea and swam safely across.

On reaching the further shore, he shook the water off him, but before long his trousers froze like boards, and the water formed in icicles about the cape. Grettir ascended through the pine-wood towards the light, and on reaching the hostel from which it proceeded, walked in without speaking to anyone, and striding up to the fire, stooped and began to scrape the red-hot embers into his iron pot. The hall was full of revellers, and these revellers were the sons of Thorir and their boat's crew. They were already more than half intoxicated, and when they saw a wild-looking man enter the hall, half naked and

hung with icicles, they thought he must be a troll or mountain-spirit.

At once every one caught up the first weapon to hand, and rushed to the attack. Grettir defended himself with a fire-brand plucked from the hearth; the sons of Thorir stumbled over the fire, and the embers were strewn about over the floor that was covered with fresh straw.

In a few moments the hall was filled with flame and smoke, and Grettir took advantage of the confusion to effect his escape. He ran down to the shore, plunged into the sea and swam across.

He found his companions waiting for him behind a rock, with a pile of dry wood which they had collected during his absence. The cinders were blown upon, and twigs applied, till a blaze was produced, and before long the whole party sat rubbing their almost frozen hands over a cheerful fire.

Next morning the merchants recognized the fiord, and, remembering that a hostel stood on the further side, they crossed the water to see it, when—what

was their dismay to find of it only a heap of smoking embers! From under some of the charred timber were thrust scorched human limbs. The chapmen, in alarm and horror, turned upon Grettir and charged him with having maliciously burned the house with all its inmates.

"See, now," said Grettir, "I had a thought that this expedition would not bring luck. I would I had not taken the trouble to get fire for such a set of thankless churls."

The ship's crew raked out the embers, pulled aside the smoking rafters, in their search for the bodies. Some of these were not so disfigured but that they could recognize them. Moreover, they knew the ship that lay at anchor under the lee, hard by, and they saw that Grettir had brought the sons of Thorir to an untimely end. The indignation of the merchants became so vehement, and their fear so great that they might be implicated in the matter, that they drove Grettir from their company, and refused to receive him into their vessel for the remainder of their voyage. Grettir, in sullen wrath, would say no

word of self-defence; he had to make his way on foot to Droutheim, where he resolved to lay the whole matter before the king.

The vessel reached Drontheim before him, and the news of the hostel burning roused universal indignation against Grettir.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ORDEAL BY FIRE.

ONE day, as King Olaf sat in audience in his great hall, Grettir strode in, and going before his seat, greeted the king. Olaf looked at him and said:

"Are you Grettir the Strong?"

He answered: "That is my name, and I have come hither, kinsman, to get a fair hearing, and to clear myself of the charge of having burned men maliciously. Of that I am guiltless."

King Olaf replied: "I heartily trust that what you say is true, and that you will be able to rid yourself of a charge so bad."

Grettir replied that he was ready to do whatsoever the king desired, in order to prove his innocence.

Then said the king to him, "Tell me the whole story, that I may be able to judge."

Grettir answered by relating the circumstances. He had simply taken fire from the hearth, when he was fallen upon by those who were drinking, and who were too tipsy to understand his explanation. He went away with the red-hot embers, and did not set fire to anything, but the drunken men kicked the glowing coals about amidst the straw.

The king remained silent some moments, and then he said: "There are no witnesses either on your behalf or against you. No man was by who is not dead. God and his angels alone know whether you speak the truth or not, therefore I must refer you to the judgment of God."

"What must I do?" asked Grettir.

"You will have to go through the ordeal of fire," said the king.

"What is that?" asked the young man.

"You must lift bars of red-hot iron, and walk

with bare feet on ploughshares heated red in a furnace."

"And what if I am burnt?"

"Then will you be adjudged guilty."

Grettir shrugged his shoulders: "If it must be so, let it be at once; but whether I be burnt or not, I declare that I am clear of all intent to hurt those men."

"You cannot undergo the ordeal now," said the king. "You would be burned to a certainty. You must go through preparation first."

"What preparation?"

"A week of fasting and prayer," was the reply.

Then Grettir was taken away and put in ward, and fed with bread and water for a week, and the bishop visited him and taught him to pray that if he were innocent, God would reveal his innocence by enabling him to pass unscathed through the ordeal.

The day came, and Drontheim was thronged with people from all the country round, to see the Icelander of whom such tales were told. A procession

was formed; first went the king's body-guard followed by the king himself, wearing his crown, then came the bishop, the choir, and the clergy, and last of all Grettir, his wild red hair flying loose in the breeze, his arms folded, and his eyes wandering over the sea of heads that filled the square before the cathedral doors. The crowd pressed in closer and closer. Opinions differed as to whether he were guilty or not. Among the mob was a young man of dark complexion, who made a great noise, shouldering his way to the front, and shouting.

"Look at the fellow!" he exclaimed. "This is the man who, in cold blood, burnt down a house over helpless men, and now he is to be given a chance of escape."

"But he says he is guiltless," argued one in the crowd.

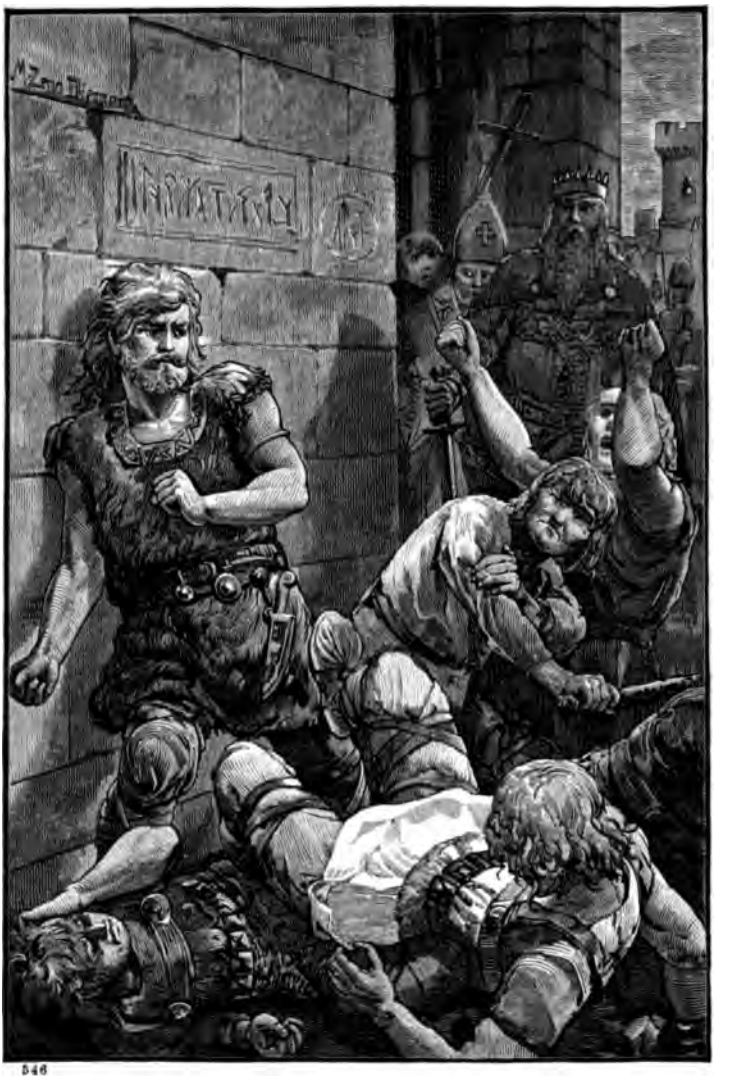
"Guiltless!" exclaimed the youth. "If one of us had done the deed, should we have been trifled with? The king wants him for his body-guard, because he is so strong."

"He should be given a chance of clearing himself," said one who stood near.

"Yes—of course—because he is a kinsman of the king. So the irons have been painted red, to look as if hot. I know how the trick is done. But he shall not escape me."

Thereupon the young man sprang at Grettir and drove his nails into his face so that they drew blood; at the same time he poured forth against him a stream of insulting names.

This was more than the Icelander could bear; he caught the young man, as a cat catches a mouse, held him aloft, shook him, and then threw him away, when he fell on the ground and was stunned. It was feared he might be killed. This act gave occasion to a general uproar; the mob wanted to lay hands on Grettir; some threw stones, others assaulted him with sticks; but he, planting his back against the church wall, turned up his sleeves, guarded off the blows, shouting to his assailants to come on. Not a man came within his reach but was sent reeling back or was felled to the ground.



GRETTIR DEFENDS HIMSELF FROM THE MOB.



In the meantime the king and the bishop were in the choir waiting. The red-hot ploughshares which had been laid on the pavement were gradually cooling, but no Grettir appeared.

At last the sounds of the uproar reached the king's ear, and he sent out to know the occasion. His messenger returned a moment after to report that the Icelander was fighting the whole town and had knocked down and well nigh killed several persons. The king thereupon sprang from his throne, hastened down the nave, and came out of the great western door when the conflict was at its height.

"Oh, sire," exclaimed Grettir, "see how I can fight the rascals!" and at the word he knocked a man over at the king's feet.

With difficulty the tumult was arrested, and Grettir separated from the combatants; and then he wanted to go with the king and try the ordeal of fire.

"Not so," answered Olaf, "you have already incurred sin. It is possible that some of those you

have knocked down may never recover, so that their blood will lie at your door."

"What is to be done?" asked Grettir.

The king considered.

"I see you are a very wicked or at all events a very unlucky man. When you were here before you were the occasion of several deaths. I do not desire to keep you in Norway, but as winter has set in you may tarry here till next spring, and then you shall be outlawed and return to Iceland."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WINTER IN NORWAY.

KING OLAF had decided that Grettir must leave Norway and return to Iceland. If he was not a guilty man he was a most unfortunate one. Now, the Norse race, whether in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, or Iceland, believed in luck. They said that certain men were born to ill-luck, and such men they avoided, because they feared lest the

ill-luck that clung to them might attach itself to, and involve those who came in contact with them.

It was not possible for Grettir to return that year to Iceland, for all the ships bound for his native land had sailed before winter set in, so King Olaf agreed to allow him to remain in the kingdom through the winter, but bound him to depart on the first opportunity next year.

Somewhat sad at heart with disappointment, and with the impression that perhaps Olaf the king was right, and that ill-luck really did weigh on him, Grettir left the court, and went at Yule to the house of a bonder or yeoman called Einar, and remained with him awhile. The farm was in a lonely place in a fiord opening back to the snowy mountains. Einar was a kindly man, hospitable, and he did his best to make Grettir's stay with him pleasant. He had a daughter, a fair, beautiful girl, with blue eyes, and hair like amber silk, and her name was Gyrid. Perhaps the beautiful Gyrid was one attraction to Grettir, but if so he never spoke

what was on his heart, because he knew it would be useless. He was an unlucky man; he had made himself a name, indeed, as one of great daring, but he had won for himself neither home, nor riches, nor favour.

Now it fell out that at this time there were some savage ruffians in the country who were called Bearsarks. They were outlaws in most cases, and they lived in secret dens in the dense forests, whence they issued and swooped down on the farms, and there challenged the bonders to fight with them, or to give up to them whatever they needed. These ruffians wore bear-skins drawn over their bodies, and they thrust their heads through the jaws of the beasts, so that they presented a hideous and frightening appearance. Then they worked themselves into paroxysms of rage, when they were like madmen; they rolled their eyes, they roared and howled like wild beasts, and foam formed on their mouths and dropped on the ground. They were wont also, when these fits came on them, to bite the edges of their shields, and with their fangs they were known

to have dinted the metal quite deep. Some folks even said they had bitten pieces out of solid shields. It was usually supposed that these Bearsarks were possessed by evil spirits, and it is probable that in many cases they were really mad—mad through having given way to their violent passions, till they knew no law, and thought to carry everything before them by their violence. It was even at one time thought by the superstitious that they could change their shapes, and run about at will in the forms of bears or wolves; but this idea grew out of the fact of their clothing themselves in bear or wolf skins, and drawing the skull of the beast over their heads as a rude helmet, and looking out through the open jaws that thus formed a visor.

One day, just after Yule, to the terror and dismay of Einar, one of the most redoubtable of these Bearsarks, a fellow called Snœkoll, came thundering up to his door on a huge black horse, followed by three or four others on foot, all clothed in skins; but Snœkoll, instead of wearing the bear's skin over his head, had on a helmet with great tusks of a

boar protruding from it, and a boar's head drawn over the metal.

It is worth remark that the crests worn later by knights, and which we have still on our plate and on harness, are derived from similar adornments to helmets. Some warriors put wings of eagles on their head-pieces, others put the paws of bears or representations of lions. These were badges of their prowess, or marks whereby they might be known.

Snœkoll struck the door of the farmhouse with his spear, and roared to the owner to come forth. At once Einar and Grettir issued from the hall, and Einar in great trepidation asked the Bearsark what he wanted.

"What do I want?" shouted Snœkoll. "I want one of two things. Either that you give me up your beautiful daughter to be my wife, and with her five-score bags of silver, or else that you fight me here. If you kill me, then luck is yours. If I kill you, then I shall carry off your daughter and all that you possess."

Einar turned to Grettir and asked him in a whis-

per what he was to do. He himself was an old man whose fighting days were over, and he had no chance against this savage.

Grettir answered that he had better consult his honour and the happiness of Gyrid, and not give way to a bully. The Bearsark sat on his horse rolling his eyes from one to another. He had a great iron-rimmed shield before him.

Then he bellowed forth: "Come! I am not going to wait here whilst you consider matters. Make your selection of the two alternatives at once. What is that great lout at your side whispering? Does he want to play a little game of who is master along with me?"

"For my part," said Grettir, "the farmer and I are about in equal predicament; he is too old to fight, and I am unskilled in arms."

"I see! I see!" roared Snœkoll. "You are both trembling in your shoes. Wait till my fit is on me, and then you will shake indeed."

"Let us see how you look in your Bearsark fit," said Grettir.



Then Snœkoll waxed wroth, and worked himself up into one of the fits of madness. There can be no doubt that in some cases this was all bluster and sham. But in many cases these fellows really roused themselves into perfect frenzies of madness in which they did not know what they did.

Now Snœkoll began to bellow like a bull, and to roll his eyes, and he put the edge of the great shield in his mouth and bit at it, and blew foam from his lips that rolled down the face of the shield. Grettir fixed his eyes steadily on him, and put his hands into his pockets. Snœkoll rocked himself on his horse, and his companions began also to bellow, and stir themselves up into madness. Grettir, with his eye fixed steadily on the ruffian, drew little by little nearer to him; but as he had no weapon, and held his hands confined, Snœkoll, if he did observe him, disregarded him. When Grettir stood close beside him and looked up at the red glaring eyes, the foaming lips of Snœkoll, and heard his howls and the crunching of his great teeth against the strong oak and iron of the shield, he suddenly

laughed, lifted his foot, caught the bottom of the shield a sudden kick upwards, and the shield with the violence of the upward shock broke Snœkoll's jaw. Instantly the Bearsark stopped his bellows, let fall the shield, and before he could draw his sword Grettir caught his helmet by the great boar tusks, gave them a twist, and rolled Snœkoll down off his horse on the ground, knelt on him, and with the ruffian's own sword dealt him his death-blow.

When the others saw the fall of their chief they ceased their antics, turned and ran away to hide in the woods.

The bonder, Einar, thanked Grettir for his assistance, and the lovely Gyrid gave him also her grateful acknowledgments and a sweet smile; but Grettir knew that a portionless unlucky man like himself could not aspire to her hand, and feeling that he was daily becoming more attached to her, he deemed it right at once to leave, and he went away to a place called Tunsberg, where lived his half-brother, Thorstein Dromund.

Now, to understand the relationship of Dromund

to Grettir, you must know that his father, Asmund, had been twice married. He had been in Norway when a young man with a merchant ship, and he had also gone with his wares to England and France, and had gained great wealth; and as he had many relations in Norway he was well received there in winter, when he came back from his merchant trips. On one of these occasions he had met a damsel called Ranveig, whose father and mother were dead. She was of good birth, and was wealthy. Asmund asked for her hand and married her, and settled on the lands that belonged to her in Norway. They had a son called Thorstein, who, because he was rather slow of speech and manner, was nicknamed Dromund; but as we meet with other Thorsteins in this story, to prevent confusion we will speak of him as Dromund.

After a while Asmund's wife Ranveig died, and then her relatives insisted on taking away all her lands and possessions and keeping them in trust for little Dromund. Asmund did not care to quarrel with them, so he left Dromund with his late wife's

relatives and went home to Iceland, where, after a few years, he married Asdis, and by her became the father of Atli, Grettir, and Illugi, and of two daughters, one of whom he named after his first wife.

Dromund grew up in Norway on his estates at Tunsberg, and became a man of wealth and renown, a quiet man, but one who held his own, and was generally respected.

Now Grettir went to him, and his half-brother received him very affectionately, and insisted on his remaining with him all the rest of the winter till it was time for him to sail to Iceland.

One little incident is mentioned concerning that time that deserves to be recorded.

Grettir slept in the same apartment as did his brother.

One morning Dromund awoke early, and he saw how that Grettir's arms were out of bed, and he wondered at their size.

Presently Grettir awoke, and then Dromund said to him: "Grettir, I have been amused with looking

at your bare arms. What muscles you have got! I never saw the like."

"I need strong muscles to do what I have to do."

"True enough, brother," said Dromund. "But I could wish there were a little more luck as well as muscle attached to those bones."

"Let me look at your arms," said Grettir.

Then Dromund put his arms out of bed, and when he saw them Grettir burst out laughing, for they were so thin and scraggy.

"Upon my word, brother, I never saw such a wretched pair of tongs in my life," he said.

"They may be a pair of tongs, old boy," answered Dromund, "but they are tongs that shall ever be extended to help you when in need. And," added Dromund in a lower tone, "if it should ever befall you that your ill-luck should overmaster you, and you not die in your bed; then, Grettir, I promise you, if I am alive, that I shall not let this pair of tongs rest till, with them, I have avenged you."

No more is related of their talk together. The spring wore on, and in summer Grettir took ship.

The brothers parted with much affection, and they never again saw each other's face.

CHAPTER XX.

OF WHAT BEFELL AT BIARG.

WHILST Grettir was in Norway, that ill-luck which pursued him did not fail to touch and trouble his Icelandic home as well.

It will be remembered that Grettir had been forced to fight the Slowcoach, and had killed him. Now the cousin of this man was Thorbiorn Oxmain, who lived in the Ramsfirth. This Thorbiorn had got a serving-man named Ali, a somewhat lazy man, strong, but unruly. As he did his work badly, and was slow about it, his master rebuked him, and when rebukes failed, he threatened him. Threats also proved unavailing, so Thorbiorn one day took the stick to his back, and beat him till he danced. After this Ali would remain no longer in his service; he ran away, crossed the ridge to the Midfiord, and came

to Biarg, where he presented himself before Atli, who asked him what he wanted.

The fellow said that he was in quest of service.

"But," said Atli, "you are, I understand, one of Thorbiorn's workmen."

"I was so, but I have left his service because I was badly treated. He beat me till I was black and blue; no one can remain with him, he is so rough with his men, and he exacts of them too much work. I have come here because I hear that you treat your servants well."

Atli replied: "I have hands enough, you had better go back to Thorbiorn, for I do not want you."

"I will never go back to him, that I declare," said the churl. "If you turn me away, I have nowhere to which I can go."

So he remained for a few nights at Biarg; and Atli did not like to turn him out of the house. Then one day he went to work with Atli's men, and worked hard and well, for he was a powerful man. So time passed. Atli did not agree to pay him any wage, and he did not send him away. He did not

feel best pleased at having the man there, but he was too kind-hearted to drive him away.

Not only did he remain there and work well, but he showed himself ready to turn his hand to anything, and was the most useful man about the place.

Now Thorbiorn heard that his churl was at Biarg. The death of Slowcoach had rankled in his breast. He had felt that it was his duty to take up the case and demand recompense, yet he had not done so; now he was angered that Atli had opened his doors to his runaway servant. He had covenanted with the man for a year, but the fellow was so disagreeable that he would have gladly dispensed with his service; but that Atli should have received him, and that the man should be making himself useful at Biarg,—that made him very angry indeed.

So he mounted his horse and rode to Biarg, attended by two men, and called out Atli to talk with him.

Atli came forth and welcomed him.

Then Thorbiorn said: "You are determined to pick up fresh occasion of quarrel, and stir ill-will

between us. Why have you enticed away my servant? You had no right to behave thus to me."

Atli replied quietly: "You are mistaken. I did not entice him away. The fellow came to me. I did not know for certain that he was your servant, nor did I know for how long he was engaged to you. Show me that I have done wrong and I will make reparation. If he is yours, reclaim him, I will not keep him. At the same time I do not like to shut him out of my house."

"I claim the man," said Thorbiorn; "I forbid him to do a stroke of work here. I expect him returned to me."

"Nay," said Atli, "take the man, you are welcome to him; but I cannot bind him hand and foot and convey him to your house. If you can get him to go with you, well and good, I will not detain him."

Atli had answered fairly, but this did not satisfy Thorbiorn; he knew that he could not drag the man back to his farm, nor could he persuade him to follow, so he rode home in a mighty bad temper, his heart boiling with anger against Atli. And now

he thought that he would at one and the same time punish Atli for taking away his servant, and wipe out the wrong of the slaying of the Slowcoach.

In the evening when the men came in from work, Atli said that Thorbiorn had been there and had reclaimed his churl, and Atli bade the fellow depart and go back to his master.

Then the man said: "That's a true proverb, He who is most praised is found most faulty at the test. I came to you because I heard so much good of you, and now that I have toiled for you without wages all the early summer, as I have worked for none else, you want to kick me out of doors as winter draws on. I will not go. You will have to beat me as Thorbiorn beat me to make me leave this house, and then, even, I am not sure but that I shall remain in spite of being beaten."

Atli did not know exactly what to do. He did not wish to ill-treat the fellow, and yet without ill-treatment there was no getting rid of him. So he let him remain on.

One day a warm wet rainy mist covered the land,

the hills were enveloped in cloud; Atli sent out some of his men to mow at a distance where there was some grass, and others he sent out fishing. He remained at home himself with only two or three men.

That day Thorbiorn rode over the ridge that divided the dales, with a helmet on his head, a sword at his side, and a barbed spear in his hand. He came to Biarg, and no one noticed his approach. He went to the main door, and knocked at it. Then he drew back behind the buildings, so that no one might see him from the door. In Iceland the walls of a house between the gables are buttressed with turf—thick walls or buttresses that project several feet, and are about six or nine feet thick. Such buttresses stood one on each side of the hall door at Biarg, and behind one of these Thorbiorn concealed himself.

When he had knocked at the door, a woman came to it, unbarred and looked up and down the terrace or platform on which the house was built, but saw no one. Thorbiorn peeped from behind the wall of

turf and caught a glimpse of her, and then backed again into his hiding-place. The woman then returned into the house, and told Atli that there was no one outside.

She had hardly spoken before Thorbiorn knocked again. Then Atli jumped up and said: "There must be someone there, and I will go and see myself who it is."

Then he went forth and looked out of the door, but saw no one, as Thorbiorn had again retreated behind the bank of turf. The water was streaming down, so Atli did not go from under cover, but laid a hand on each of the door-posts, and looked up and down the valley.

Just as he was looking away from where Thorbiorn was concealed, that man suddenly swung himself round the bank of turf, and with all his might drove the spear against Atli, using both his hands. The spear entered him below the ribs, and ran right through him. Atli uttered no cry, and fell forward over the threshold. At that the women rushed forth, and they took Atli up, but he was dead.

Then Thorbiorn, who had run to his horse, which was tied up behind the house, rode out on the terrace, and halting before the door proclaimed that he had done this deed.

Now this was a formality which, according to Icelandic law, made his act to be not regarded as a murder. A murder by law was the slaying of a man by one who concealed his name.

Then Thorbiorn rode home.

The goodwife, Asdis, sent for her men, and Atli's body was laid out, and he was buried beside his father, old Asmund, who had died during the winter. There was a church in those days at Biarg, but there is none there now. When I was there I asked of the farmer now living in Biarg where was the old churchyard, but its site was lost; so I could not tell where were the graves of Atli the kind-hearted, honourable man, and the rest of the family.

Great was the lamentation through the district at the death of one so loved and respected, and hard things were said of Thorbiorn for what he had done.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN OF GRETTIR.

THAT same summer news reached Iceland of the burning of the hostel by Grettir. When Thorir of Garth heard of the death of his sons he was furious. He rode to the great annual assize at Thingvalla, with a large retinue, and charged Grettir with having killed his boys maliciously; and he demanded that for this offence Grettir should be outlawed.

Then Skapti the judge said: "If things are as reported, then surely Grettir has committed an evil deed; but we have only heard one side of the story, and we only know of what has happened at third hand, by report; there are two ways of telling every story. Let us wait till Grettir returns to Iceland. There will be time enough for this action to be taken. I will not give my word that Grettir is guilty till we have heard what he has to say for himself."

But Thorir was such a powerful chieftain that he

overbore all resistance. It was said that he could not lawfully take action against a man in his absence; but this was overridden by Thorir, who by packing the court was able to carry out what he wanted. Moreover, owing to the death of Atli there was no one to oppose him vigorously.

He pushed on matters so hard that nought could avail to acquit Grettir, and he was proclaimed an outlaw throughout the whole of Iceland, and Thorir also put a price on his head of many ounces of silver, which he said he would pay to that man who would kill him in Norway or Iceland, or wherever he might find him.

Towards the close of the summer Grettir arrived in a vessel off the mouth of the White-river, an exile from Norway.

It was a still summer night when the ship dropped anchor. A boat came from the shore, and was rowed to the ship. Grettir stood watching it from the bows, leaning on his sword. As it touched the side of the ship, he called, "What news do you bring?"

"Are you Grettir, Asmund's son?" asked a man rising in the boat.

"I am," replied Grettir.

"Then we bear you ill news: your father is dead."

Another man stood up in the boat, and said: "Grettir, he was an old man, and you can hardly have expected to hear that he was still alive. But what I have to say concerns you as closely, and is unexpected. Your brother Atli has been slain by Thorbiorn Oxmain."

Then a third man rose and said: "But these tidings concern others first and you secondly. What I have to say concerns you mainly. You have been made an outlaw throughout the length and breadth of the land, and a price is set on your head."

It is said that Grettir did not change colour, nor did a muscle in his whole body quiver; but he lifted up his voice and sang this strain—

"All at once are showered
Round me, the Rhymer,
Tidings sad—my exile,
Father's loss and brother's,

Branching boughs of battle!
Many a blue-blade-breaker
Shall suffer for my sorrow."

The branching bough of battle is a periphrasis for a man, so also is a blue-blade-breaker; and it is the use of such periphrases that constituted poetry to Icelandic ideas. One night Grettir swam ashore. He thought that his enemies would be awaiting him, and should he venture to land in a boat would fall on him in overwhelming numbers; so he took to the water and swam to a point at some distance. Then he took a horse that he found in a farm near where he came ashore, and he rode across country to the Middle-firth, and reached home in two days. He reached Biarg during the night when all were asleep; so instead of disturbing the household, he opened a private door, stepped into the hall, stole up to his mother's bed, and threw his arms round her neck.

She started up, and asked who was there. When he told her, she clasped him to her heart, and laid her head, sobbing, on his breast, saying. "Oh, my son! I am bereaved of my children! Atli, my

eldest, has been foully murdered, and you are outlawed; only Illugi remains."

Grettir remained at home a few days in close concealment. Even the men of the farm were not suffered to know that he was there. He heard the story of how Thorbiorn Oxmain had basely and in cowardly manner slain his brother, when Atli was unarmed; and Grettir considered that it was his duty to avenge his death.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SLAYING OF OXMAIN.

ONE fine day, soon after his return, Grettir mounted a horse, and without an attendant rode over the hill to the Ramsfirth, and came down to Thorod's-stead. This is still a good farm, the best on the fiord, and it is by far the best built pile of buildings thereabouts. It faces the south and is banked up with turf to the north, to shelter it against the cold and furious gales from the Polar Sea. The soil is comparatively rich there, and there

are tracts of good grass land on the slope of the hill by the side of the inlet of sea. The farm buildings consists at present of a set of wooden gable ends painted red, and the roofs are all of turf, where the buttercups grow and shine luxuriantly.

Grettir rode up to the farmhouse, about noon, and knocked at the door. Some women came out and welcomed him; they did not know who he was, or they would have been more sparing in their welcome. He asked after Thorbiorn, and was told that he was gone to the meadow, a little way further down the firth, where he had gone to bind hay, and that he had taken with him his son, called Arnor, who was a boy of sixteen.

When Grettir heard this, he said farewell to the women, and turned his horse's head to ride down the fiord towards a boiling spring that bubbles up out of the rock, throwing up a cloud of steam, and running in a scalding rill into the sea. Now the rock is perhaps warm there, or the warm water helps vegetation; certain it is that thereabouts the grass grows thickly, and there it was that Thorbiorn was

making his bundles of hay. As Grettir rode along near the water, below the field, Thorbiorn saw him. He had just made up one bundle of hay, and he was engaged on another. He had set his shield and sword against the load, and his lad Arnor had a hand-axe beside him.

Thorbiorn looked hard at Grettir as he came along, and he said to the boy: "There is a fellow riding this way. I wonder who he is, and whether he wants us. Leave tying up the hay, and let us find out what his errand is."

Then Grettir leaped off his horse; he had a helmet on his head, and was girt with the short sword, and he bore a great spear in his hand that had a long sharp blade but no barbs. The socket was inlaid with silver, and a nail went through the socket fastening it on to the staff of the spear. He sat down on a stone, and knocked the nail out. His reason was that he intended to throw the spear at Thorbiorn, and if he missed him, he thought the spear-head and the haft would come apart, and would be of no use to Thorbiorn to fling back at him.

Oxmain said to his son: "I verily believe that is Grettir, Asmund's son, he is so big; I know no one else so big. He has got occasion enough against us, and if he is come here it is not with peaceable intentions. Now we must manage cunningly. I do not know that he has seen you; so you hide behind the bundle of hay, and lie hid till you see him engaged with me. Then you steal up noiselessly behind with your axe, and strike him one blow with all your might between the shoulder-blades. When I see you coming up, I will fight the more furiously so as to draw off his attention, that he may not be able to look round. Have no fear, he cannot hurt you, as his back will be turned to you. Get close enough to make sure, and you will kill him with one blow."

Now Grettir came uphill into the field, and when he came within a spear-throw of them, he cast his spear at Thorbiorn; but the head was looser on the shaft than he had expected it would be, and it became detached in its flight, and fell off and dropped into a marshy place and sank, and the shaft

flew on but a little way and then fell harmlessly to the ground.

Then Thorbiorn took his shield, put it before him, drew his sword and ran against Grettir and engaged him. Grettir had, as already said, the short sword that he had taken out of the barrow, and with that he warded off the blows of Thorbiorn and smote at him. Oxmain was a very strong man, and his shield was covered with well-tanned hide stretched over oak, and the blade of Grettir fell on it, hacked into it, and sometimes caught so that he could not at once withdraw it. Thorbiorn now began to deal more furious blows. Now just as Grettir was wrenching his sword away from the shield, into which it had bitten deep, he saw someone close behind him with an axe raised. Instantly he tore out his sword and smote back over his head to protect his back from his assailant behind, and the blow came on Arnor just as he was on the point of driving his axe in between the shoulders of Grettir, so that he staggered back, mortally wounded. Thorbiorn, whose eye was on his son, retreated a step, lost his presence of mind for

a moment, and thereupon down came Grettir's sword on his shield and split it in half. Grettir pursued his advantage, pressed on him, and struck him down at his feet, dead at a blow.

Then he went in search of his silver-inlaid spear-head, but could not find it. So he mounted his horse again, rode on to the nearest farmhouse, and there told what he had done. Many, many years after, about 1250, the spear-head was found in the marsh. When I was in Iceland I also obtained a very similar spear-head, only not silver-inlaid, that was found in the volcanic sand; it had probably been lost in a very similar manner.

It seems to us in these civilized times very horrible this continual slaying that took place in Iceland; but we must remember that, as already said, there were in those days not a single policeman, soldier, or officer of justice in the island. When a trial took place, the prosecutor was the person aggrieved, or the nearest akin. The court pronounced sentence, and then the prosecutor was required to carry out what the law had ordered. He was to be constable

and executioner. Now the law, or custom which was the same as law, for there was no written code, was that when one man had been killed, the next of kin was bound to prosecute the slayer and obtain from him money compensation, or outlawry, or else he might kill the slayer himself, or one of his kin. This latter provision seems to us outrageous, that because A kills B, therefore that C, who is B's brother, may kill D, who is brother to A. But so the law or custom stood and was recognized as binding, and not to carry out the law or custom was regarded as dishonourable. It must be remembered that Iceland was colonized about A.D. 900, and that Grettir was born only about 97 years after, and that Christianity was adopted in 1000; that is to say, it was sanctioned by law, but no one was forced to become a Christian unless he liked. Also, that there was no government in the island, no central authority, and that the colonists lived much as do the first settlers now in a new colony which is not under the crown, or like the diggers at the gold mines.

When Grettir had slain Thorbiorn Oxmain, he went

home to Biarg and told his mother, who said it was well that Atli's blood was wiped out by the death of the man who had so basely and in such cowardly fashion slain him; but she said she foresaw more trouble coming like a rising black cloud, and that this would make it more difficult for Grettir to get relief from his outlawry.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT LEARWOOD.

AFTER the slaying of Thorbiorn Oxmain, Grettir would not remain at home, lest trouble should come on his mother; so he rode across the Neck first of all to his brother-in-law, at Melar, at the head of the Ramsfirth, to ask his advice. His brother-in-law there was called Gamli; he was not very rich or powerful, and he represented to Grettir that it would never do for him to remain in such near proximity to Thorod's-stead, in the same valley, at the head of the same firth. This Grettir acknowledged, so he

stayed there but a few days, and then rode over the high table-land to the Lax, or Salmon-dale, where was the watershed, and the river of the salmon ran west into Hvamsfiord. One of the most interesting and best written of the Icelandic sagas relates to the history of this valley. The Hvamsfiord is by nature wonderfully protected against western storms, for the entrance is almost blocked to the west by a countless multitude of islands, of which only one is moderately large, and to the north-west is not only a grassy promontory, but also a natural breakwater of three long narrow islands.

Outside the cluster of islands are eddies and whirlpools, and the passage between them is not always safe; but when a vessel has passed through between the islets it enters as into a wide beautiful inland lake, the shape of which is that of a boot, with the sole to the east and the toe turned up north. Moreover, along the north side of this sheltered firth are high and steep hills that screen from the water all gales sweeping from the Pole; and in the glens and under the crags of these

hills exposed to the south are beautiful woods of birch.

Formerly in Iceland the woods were much more extensive than they are now; for the old settlers found in them plenty of fuel, and the birch-trees grew to a fair size. Now, alas, with fatal want of consideration, the trees have been so cut down that the woods are rare and the trees are small. There is hardly a birch-tree whose top one cannot touch when riding through a wood on a little pony no bigger than a Shetlander.

Exactly at the toe of the boot is a rich grassy basin, where two streams flow into the fiord, and here is a beautiful view from the water. One sees in front the green basin, and above it rise the mountains to Skeggoxl, a cone covered with eternal snows and with glaciers streaming down its flanks. Here, in a sweet sheltered nook, basking in the sun, in spring with the river-side and the marshes blazing with immense marigolds, and with the short grass slopes speckled with blue tiny gentianella, is the farm, and near it the wooden church of Hvam. In another

part of the basin is a settlement called Asgard, the "Home of the gods;" for those who settled there first thought the spot so delightful, so warm, that they named it after the sunny land of fable, where it was said that their ancestors, the hero-gods of the northern race, had lived in the east before ever they crossed Russia and settled in Norway. Asgard to their minds was Paradise.

Paradise in Iceland is not a paradise elsewhere; nevertheless, to one who has travelled over barren hills and between glaciers, this warm nook with its green grass and woods of glistening birch was a place of inexpressible charm. Now, just to the east, where would come the ball of the toe, looking across the end of this still blue lake-like fiord, up the valleys to the snows of Skeggoxl, is the farm of Learwood, in a grassy flat by the water, backed by birchwood and hills, and screened from the east as well as from the north winds. Here lived Thorstein Kuggson. Kuggson's mother was the daughter of Asgeir, the father of Audun of Willowdale, with whom Grettir had a tussle on the ice, and whom he afterwards

upset with his foot when he was carrying curds. Kuggson through his father was related to the influential and wealthy family in the Laxdale, whose history is well known through the noble saga that relates the story of that valley.

Grettir spent the autumn with his relative Kuggson. Now, whilst he was there he fell to talking one day with Kuggson about his trial of strength with Audun, and Grettir said how glad he was that nothing had come of it. It was said that he was a man of ill-luck; yet luck had befriended him on that occasion in sending Bard to interrupt the struggle before both lost their tempers and the quarrel became serious.

Then said Kuggson: "You remind me of the story of Bottle-back, which, of course, you know."

"It is many years since I have heard the tale," answered Grettir; "for, indeed, I can be little at home now, and am out of the way of hearing stories of one's forefathers. Tell me the tale."

Then Kuggson told Grettir

The Story of Bottle-Back.

"You know very surely, Grettir, that your great-grandfather was Onund Treefoot. He was so called because in the great battle of Haf's fiord, fought against King Harald, he had one of his legs cut off below the knee. You have been told how that Onund had first to wife Asa, and that he settled at Cold-back; and he had by his first wife two sons, Thorgeir and Ufeig, who was also called Grettir, and it is after him that you are named. Onund's second wife was the mother of Thorgrim Grizzlepate, your grandfather.

"The story I am going to tell you relates to Thorgeir, the eldest son of Onund, and how he got the name of Bottle-back. You might think he acquired the designation from a rounded back. It was not so, he had a back as straight as yours.

"But to understand the story of how he got the name, I must go back to the time when Onund, your great-grandfather, came to Iceland. That was in the year of Christ 900; he was unable to remain

any longer in Norway, because the king, Harald, was in such enmity with him. So he resolved that he would come to Iceland and seek there a new home. Now this was somewhat late, for the colonization of this island had begun some five or six and twenty years before, and there had come out great numbers of Norwegian chiefs, who fled from the rapacity and the vengeance of King Harald Fairhair, who outlawed every man who took up arms against him."

But the story shall be told not in Kuggson's words, but in mine.

Onund sailed to Iceland from Norway in the summer of A.D. 900, and he had a hard voyage and baffling winds from the south that drove him far away to the north into the Polar Sea, till he came near the pack-ice; and then there came a change, and he made south, and after much beating about, for he had lost his reckoning, he made land, and found that he had come upon the north coast of Iceland, and those who knew the looks of the land said he was off the Strand Bay. To the west rose the rocks and glaciers of the Drang Jokull, and to the east

the long promontory that separated the Hunafloi from Skagafiord.

Presently a ten-oared boat put off from shore, rowed by six men, and approached Onund's vessel, and the men in the boat hailed the vessel and asked whose it was. Onund gave his name and inquired to whom the men belonged. They said they were servant men belonging to a farm at Drangar, just under the mighty field of glacier of Drang Jokull. Onund asked if all the land was taken up by settlers, and the men answered that along the north coast all such land as was worth anything was taken already, and that most was also settled to the south.

Then Onund consulted with his shipmates what was to be done, whether coast along the north protuberance of Iceland in search of uninhabited land, or go into the great bay and see whether any chance opened for them there. They had arrived so late in Iceland after the main rush of settlers that they could not expect to get any really favourable quarters. The men advised against exploring the north, exposed to the cold gales from the Polar Sea, where

the fiords would be blocked with ice half the year; and thought there would be no harm trying what they could find further south.

So Onund turned his vessel in towards the head of the splendid bay Hunafloi; but seeing a creek that seemed fairly sheltered, having on the north some quaint spikes of rock, and a great mountain to the south like a horn, and finding that this fiord gave a turn northwards under the shelter of the mountains, the men with Onund's consent ran in there, and having anchored the vessel, entered a boat and rowed ashore. On reaching the strand they were met by men who asked them who they were and what they did there. Onund said he had come with peaceable intentions, and then he was told that all that fiord was occupied, and that the owner of the land was Eric Trap, a wealthy man. Eric came to the beach and hospitably invited Onund and his ship's crew to his house. There Onund told him his difficulty. He had come to Iceland too late, and he feared that he would be able nowhere to find unclaimed lands.

Eric considered a while, and then said there was more land that he had claimed than he could well keep in hand, and that he would be pleased to accommodate a man of such noble family and character as was Onund. Onund pressed him to receive payment for the land, but this Eric generously refused. When he had come there, said Eric, the country had been unpeopled, and he had just claimed what he liked, and had claimed more than he wanted. Now he desired to have neighbours, and if Onund would be friendly none would be better pleased than himself to have him near.

This gratifying offer satisfied Onund, but, as the saying is, 'Don't look a gift-horse in the mouth,' he did not at once close with the offer, but asked to be allowed to see the land Eric was so ready to part with.

Accordingly he rode with Eric along the coast, passed the headland where was the horn-shaped mountain, and came upon a fiord where some boiling springs poured up in the sea out of its depths; the mountains on the north came down so abruptly to



the water's edge that the only habitable ground lay at the head of the firth and on the south side, having a northern aspect. Moreover there was a lofty range to the south, so that in winter the sun would never light up this firth. Onund did not much like it, he thought that Eric had offered him the place because he did not care for it himself; so he went across the mountain range and down into the little bay south of it. As they rode it was over snow, a long descent of wintry mountain, till they reached a valley in which was a hot spring, a little lake, and some grass. The situation was somewhat more inviting than that Onund had already seen, but it was not very attractive, and looking back on the long dreary slope of snow he said, "A cold back! a cold back! I would like to have had one warmer." "That is not easily acquired," answered Eric. "Further south there is no fiord for many miles till you come to one occupied by a man called Biarni. That I can tell you is a fertile settlement, there are woods and pastures, and hot springs and good anchorage; but that is not my land to give you."



Then Onund sang a stave:

"All across life's strands do run,
I who many war-wagers won,
Meadows green and pastures fair
Once were mine, and woods to spare.
Left behind, I rid the steed
That o'er wave, with wind doth speed.[1]
Cold—cold, icy back behind,
This is what alone I find,
Hard the lot that fate doth yield
To the bearer of the shield."

Eric answered, "Many men have lost everything in Norway, and have got nothing in exchange. Cold may be the back against which to lean; but better cold back than none at all."

This was true. Onund had not received Eric's offer graciously; but he now accepted it, and he called the second bay he saw—that into which he had descended over snow—Coldback, and that remains the name to this day.

Eric behaved very nobly; he gave up to Onund the whole tract of land from the Horn-headland to

[1] *i.e.* a ship.

the limit where Biarni's land began. He received the whole of Reykjafiord, Fishless Creek, and Coldback Bay.

Then Onund built himself a house at Coldback; and there was no difficulty about wood, for the Gulf-stream flowed up past the great north-west promontory of Iceland, curled round into Hunafloi, and deposited a quantity of American timber as drift all along that coast. Indeed, the drift was so abundant that neither Eric nor Onund made any agreement about it. Now, as it happened in the sequel, this was an oversight.

Onund prospered at Coldback, and even set up for himself a second farm at the head of the firth to the north, called Reykja-firth, from the boiling springs that puffed and bubbled up in the sea at the entrance; and a hot spring is in Icelandic —Reykr.

Now, a few years after Onund had settled in Iceland, his good wife Asa died. He had by her two sons—the elder was called Thorgeir, and the younger Ufeig Grettir. After a while Onund went

courting a woman called Thordis, in Middle-firth, and he married her, and by her had a son called Thorgrim; he grew to be a big man, very strong, wise, and a capital man at husbandry. When he was twenty-five years old his hair grew gray, and so he went by the name of Thorgrim Grizzle-pate, and he was the grandfather of Grettir. After the death of Onund, his widow married, as already said, Audun of Willowdale, and their son was Asgeir, the father of Grettir's cousin Audun, with whom he had that affray on the ice, and then with the bottle of curds.

When Onund was a very old man, then he died in his bed, and he was buried under a great mound, which you may see at Coldback if you go there. It is called Old Treefoot's cairn. When he was dead, then Thorgrim Grizzlepate and his half-brothers, Thorgeir and Ufeig Grettir, lived together on the best of terms at Coldback, and managed the property between them.

In time Eric Trap of Arness died also, and left his lands to his son Flossi. He had remained in

friendship with Onund all his life; but Flossi, his son, was a grasping man, and he was often heard to grumble about the Coldback family, and say that they were squatters on his father's land, and had no title to show for the land they held. Thorgrim Grizzlepate and his half-brothers did not wish to quarrel with Flossi, so they kept out of his company; and when there were sports of hurling, and wrestling, and horse-fighting, strayed away, so as not to be involved in a quarrel with him.

Now, Thorgeir was the eldest of the three brothers at Coldback, and he was mightily fond of fishing. This was known to Flossi, and he made a plot for slaying him; for he was envious of the brothers, and wanted to get back all their lands into his own possession. He had got a house-churl called Finn, and he and Finn had some talk together. The end of this talk was that Finn started secretly for Coldback armed with a hatchet, and he hid himself in the boat-house at Coldback.

Early in the morning Thorgeir got ready to go out fishing, for the weather was good, the sea

calm and was alive with fish. His nets were in the boat, and before sunrise he left his bed and dressed, and went to the boat-house to start on his excursion. He had not the smallest suspicion of mischief, and as he was like to be on the water for a long time, he flung a great leather bottle of curds over his back. As already said, these leather bottles were no other than the hides of goats or sheep, sewn up and converted into receptacles for liquid.

So Thorgeir went to the boat-house with the bottle of curd over his back, opened the door, and went in. He did not look round, he had no suspicion of evil, and he did not see Finn lurking in the dark corner. It was, moreover, very dark in the boat-house. Thorgeir stooped to get hold of the boat and thrust her out, when all at once out from the dark corner leaped the churl, and brought the axe down on Thorgeir's back. The blow made the bottle squeak, and all the curds gushed out. That was enough for Finn. He made sure he had killed Thorgeir, so he ran away as fast as he could back to Arness, burst into the house, and shouted to his

master "I have killed him! I have killed him! And he squeaked! he squeaked!"

"Let me look at the axe," said Flossi. Then, when he had the axe in his hand he turned it about and laughed, and said, "Verily, I did not think that Thorgeir had milk in his veins instead of blood. That accounts for it, that you have been able to slay him."

This affair was a subject of much comment, and much laughter did it provoke. Thorgeir had not received the smallest wound, only his bottle was split, and ever after he went by the name of Bottle-back.

But a song was made about this event which was never forgotten. It runs thus:—

"Of the days of old
Great tales are told
How heroes went forth to fight,
Their shields, for show
Were whitened as snow,
And their weapons were burnished bright.
The battle began,
In the weapon-clang,
The red blood flowed apace

In rivers shed
It dyed red
The shields o'er all their face.
But nowaday
We tune our lay
To tell a different story.
The churls who fight
Bring axes white,
With curds and whey made gory."

When Kuggson ceased, Grettir laughed heartily. "Ah!" said he, "that cannot be said now, for indeed there flows much blood."

"You speak the truth," answered Kuggson; "and I wish that this red stream flowed less abundantly."

"That may be," said Grettir; "but I would fain hear the rest of the story. I have not heard it told me for a long time; and, indeed, to speak the truth, much of it I have clean forgotten, though I did hear it when I was a boy at home."

"If you will hear what follows, it must be as a new story," said Kuggson. Again I will tell it in my own words.

The Story of the Stranded Whale.

Hard times came to Iceland, such as had not been known since it was settled, for the timber that had been thrown up by the sea came to an end, or very nearly so. There had been great accumulations, and these were exhausted, and for some reason or other that cannot now be explained the Gulf-stream ceased to carry on its current the amount of timber it had formerly, the wreckage of the forests on the Mississippi, swept down into the great Mexican Gulf, and thence washed out over the vast Atlantic, borne on the warm stream to the north, to give fuel to those lands which were by nature unprovided with trees. At this time the axe was laid against the largest and finest birch that grew in the forests in Iceland. But none of that timber was big and good enough for building purposes.

This deficiency in drift-wood continued for many seasons, and if men required building timber they were constrained to send to Norway for it. Now, it happened that about this time a great merchant

vessel was wrecked in the fiord in the lap of which was Arness, where lived Flossi, and he took four or five of the chapmen to his house, and lodged them there well and hospitably, and the other wrecked men were quartered in other farmhouses near. All winter the men were engaged in building a new ship out of the wreck and what other timber they could get; but they were not skilful over their work, and they built a badly-proportioned vessel, over small at the stem and stern and over big amidships; and this vessel was much laughed at, and men called it the Wooden-tub, and that bay where Flossi lived was ever after called Wooden-tub Bay, because this broad-beamed, comical vessel was built there.[1]

Now, it fell out that at the spring equinox there was a great storm from the north, and it lasted a week. The waves came in huge rollers against the cliffs, and spouted like geysers into the air, and all the air was in a haze with spray, and was full of the noise of the sea. Those who lived on the coast were not sorry for the storm, because they hoped it would

[1] It is still so called, Trèkyllis-vík.

blow in drift-wood and other spoils of the deep upon the shores; and sure enough, when it abated, a man who lived out on Reykja-ness came and told Flossi that there was a great whale washed ashore there. Then Flossi sent word to all the farms round to the north. But hard-by where the whale had come ashore lived a farmer named Einar, who was a tenant under the brothers at Coldback, so he took a boat and rowed off to Coldback, and told them about the monster that was stranded.

When Thorgrim and his brothers Thorgeir and Ufeig heard this, they got ready at once, and were twelve in a ten-oared boat, with axes and knives for cutting up the whale. Another boat put off from another of their farms, with six men in it, and others were sure to come as soon as they could get ready.

In the meantime, Flossi and all his company, his kindred, servants, and tenants, had hurried to the spot, and were already engaged in cutting up the whale, when round the ness came the boat of the brothers. Now, the shore where the whale was cast up belonged to the brothers, and they called out

to Flossi to assert their right to whatever was found on the strand. Flossi answered that if they had any right to the drift they must show their claim. They had, he said, been allowed by his father to squat on his land, but his father had never given over to them all his rights, certainly not the lordship over the strand, and claim to flotsam and jetsam. Whilst the dispute continued, up came other boats of the Coldback party, and then a long boat, that contained a fellow called Swan, who lived in Biornfiord, to the south of Coldback, a very warm friend of the brothers, and a plucky, resolute man.

Thorgrim was hesitating what to do, when Swan told him it would be mean to allow himself to be robbed. Moreover, this assault on his rights, if not resisted would establish a precedent, and Flossi would claim everything found on their strand, even at their very doors.

So a fight began. The Coldback men came ashore, and Thorgeir Bottle-back mounted the carcase of the whale, to drive off the servants of Flossi. Among these was Finn; he was near the head of

the whale, and stood in a foothold he had cut for himself. Then Thorgeir Bottle-back said, "Ah! I owe you a stroke of the axe, which has not been repaid as yet," and he smote at him, and felled him.

Flossi egged on his men, and a desperate fight ensued; some fought on the body of the whale, some about it. There were hardly any present who had other weapons save choppers and axes, and they hewed at each other with these. But some had no other weapons than the ribs of the whale, and it is even said that some of the churls flourished great strips of blubber, with which they banged each other about, nearly smothering each other in oil, but not doing much harm.

The battle was going ill with Flossi, when there arrived a contingent of men from Drangar, with many boats, and gave help to Flossi, and then those of Coldback were borne back overpowered; but they did not retreat till they had loaded their boats. Swan shouted to the Coldbackers to get on board as quickly as they could, for he saw more men coming against them from the north. Flossi received a wound,

but Ufeig, one of the three brothers, was dealt his death-wound before he could get into the boat, and he fell on the strand. Thorgeir Bottle-back at once leaped out of the vessel, ran to his brother, heaved him up in his arms and plunged back through the surf with him, and lifted him into the boat, where he died. It is told that in this battle one man was beaten to death by the rib of a whale, and that was one of the chapmen of the wrecked vessel.

After this, the matter was brought before the assize, for the question of the right to the shore had to be decided one way or the other. And it was decided in this manner: Flossi was condemned to outlawry for his high-handed proceeding, and because of the death of Ufeig Grettir; but the question of the rights was thus settled by the judge, Thorkel Moon. He said, "I cannot see that the claim made by the Coldback men is established, for no money passed between Onund and Eric. I know this about the land that was possessed by my grandfather Ingolf, and which is now my own. He received it from Steinver the Old; but then he gave

her a mottled cloak, and that was a pledge of sale; and this has never been contested. In the matter of the lands inhabited by the Coldback men, as far as I can learn, not even a straw was given in exchange. However, it is proved that they have held the land, and have taken the drift for a long time; and that the original owner, Eric, did not dispute their doing so. I therefore decide that a compromise shall hold good. The Coldback brothers must surrender all the Reykja-firth, and content themselves with the land south of that. And I also decide that they shall exercise full and undisputed rights to the land, to all that grows on it, to the sea and what it throws up, along that bit of strand that remains to them."

Now when Kuggson had finished this story, then Grettir said, "You have not told how my grandfather and great-uncle parted."

"No," said Kuggson. "There is not much to tell about that. The two brothers agreed to separate, as your grandfather wanted to marry in the Middle-firth. Bottle-back remained at Coldback."

"Now that you have spoken so much about Cold-back," said Grettir, "I will tell you something, though it is to my discredit."

"Say on," answered Kuggson. "Men are generally more ready to boast than to discredit themselves."

"When I was a little boy," said Grettir, "my father suffered from a cold back and great pains in it, in winter, and he only got ease when it was rubbed with a hot flannel. I was a bad, idle boy, and I was set in winter to rub his cold back. This I resented. I thought it was a work fit only for servants, and one day when my father had made me rub his old back till I was tired, then he said to me, 'You are growing slack; rub harder, that I may feel your hand.' 'Do you so want to feel my hand, father,' I said. Then I saw a wool-comb hard by that the women had used for carding wool, and I caught it and rubbed down my father's back with that—so that he shrieked with pain, and I made the blood flow. It was a wicked act. I think of it now the old man is dead, and I am sorry."

"Yes," said Kuggson, "it was an evil act. Men say that you are an unlucky man. Now, I do not wonder at your ill-luck, for none ever raised his hand against his father but there followed him ill in consequence of so doing all his days."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FOSTER-BROTHERS.

NOW, the kinsmen of Oxmain heard where Grettir was, so they resolved to form a party, and fall upon him at Learwood. But Grettir's brother-in-law was aware of this and forewarned Grettir, so he went away to the north, and he followed Gilsfiord till he reached Reyk-knolls, where was a pleasant farm near the sea, where also were a great number of ever-boiling springs, that poured and squirted and fizzed out of mounds of red-clay. Here lived a man called Thorgils Arison, and he asked this man if he would give him shelter through the winter.

Arison said that he would. "But," said he, "there is only plain fare in my house."

"I am not choice as to my food, so long as I have a roof over my head," answered Grettir.

"There is one matter further," said Arison. "Somehow or other I get men come to me and offer to become my guests who cannot settle elsewhere, and I get a rough lot at times. That comes of being too good-hearted to bid them pack. Even now I have two such good-for-naughts guesting with me, two foster-brothers, Thorgeir and Thormod; rough, unkempt men, of bad tempers both, and I wot not how you will agree together. You may come and put your head within my doors if you will, but on one condition, that there be no fighting and knocking about of my other guests."

Grettir answered that he would not be the first to raise strife, and that if the foster-brothers provoked him beyond endurance he would go elsewhere, and not give his host annoyance by a brawl in his house.

With this promise Arison was content.

Thorgils Arison was a firm man, and he told the foster-brothers that he would have no disturbance whilst they were with him, and they also promised to be orderly. Thorgeir did not like Grettir. He scowled at him and contradicted him, but did not pursue his rudeness beyond bounds; and when Grettir was ruffled, a word from the master of the house served to appease the rising blood.

So the early winter wore away.

Now, the good man, Thorgils Arison, owned a cluster of islands in the firth that are called Olaf's Isles; they lie a good sea-mile and a half beyond the ness. On them grass grows, and there the bonder kept his cattle to fatten in autumn. Now, there was an ox on one of these isles that Arison said he must have home before the snows and storms of winter came on, as he intended to kill the beast for the feastings of Yule. So the foster-brothers and Grettir volunteered to go out to the island, and fetch the ox home.

They went down to the sea and got out a ten-oared boat, and there were but these three to man

it. The weather was cold, and the wind was shifting from the north and not settled. They rowed hard, and reached the island; but the sea was running and foaming over the shore, and they saw it would be no easy matter to get the ox on board with such a surf. So the brothers told Grettir he must hold the boat, whilst they got the ox in. He agreed, and went into the water, and stood amidships on the side out to sea, and thrust the boat towards the shore, whilst the brothers laboured to get the ox in. Thorgeir took up the ox by the hind legs, and Thormod by the fore legs, as the beast refused to be driven on board, and so they carried the animal into the boat; but Grettir, who held the craft, had the sea up to his shoulder-blades, and he held her perfectly fast.

When the ox was hove in, Grettir let go and got into the boat. Thormod took oar in the bows, Thorgeir amidships, and Grettir aft, and so they made out into the open bay. As they came out from the lee of the island the squall caught them, the waves leaped and foamed, and Thorgeir shouted

"Now then, stern! Have you gone to sleep? Why are you lagging?"

Grettir answered, "The stern will not lag when the rowing afore is good."

Thereupon Thorgeir fell to rowing so furiously that both the tholes were broken. So he called to Grettir, "Row on steadily whilst I mend the thole-pins."

Then Grettir rowed so mightily, whilst Thorgeir was engaged mending the pins, that he wore through the oars, and when Thorgeir was ready they snapped like matches.

"Better row with less haste and more caution," growled Thormod.

Then Grettir stooped and picked out of the bottom of the boat two unshapen oar-beams that lay there; but as they were too big to go between the thole-pins, he bored large holes in the gunwales, and thrust the oars through, and rowed thus so mightily that every rib and plank of the boat creaked, and the foster-brothers were in fear lest with his rowing he would tear the craft to pieces. However, they reached the shore in safety.

Then Grettir asked whether the brothers would rather haul up the boat, or go home with the ox. They preferred to haul the boat ashore, and found that it was hung with icicles, for the water had frozen on the sides; but Grettir led home the ox, which was very fat, and very unwilling to be dragged along, so that Grettir became impatient.

When the foster-brothers had finished bailing out the boat, and had put her under cover, they went up to the house, and on reaching it Thorgeir inquired after Grettir, but Arison the bonder said he had not seen him or the ox. Then he sent out men in quest of him, for he supposed something must have befallen him; and when they came to where the land dipped towards the sea they saw a strange object indeed coming towards them, and did not know at first whether what they saw was a human being or a troll.[1] On approaching nearer they saw that this strange object was Grettir, who was carrying the ox on his back, and striding up the hill with the beast, which had the head hanging over his shoulder, the tongue out,

[1] A troll is a mountain demon or giant.

and was lowing plaintively. The sight was infinitely comical, and the men who saw it burst out laughing, and this made Grettir also laugh, so that he dropped the ox.

Now, it must be known that this story is not manifestly absurd, for the Icelandic cattle are very small, like Brittany cows, and bear the same relation to a good English ox that a pony does to a horse. Nevertheless the feat was only such as a strong man could have accomplished. It had taken the two brothers to carry the ox down into the boat, and here was Grettir alone carrying him up hill.

This deed of Grettir was much talked of, and this made Thorgeir, the elder of the foster-brothers, very jealous of Grettir, and he hated him, and sought to do him an injury. One day after Yule, Grettir went down to the bath that was made by turning a stream of hot water from one of the natural boiling springs into a walled basin into which also cold water could be turned from a rill. In former times the Icelanders were very particular about bathing, and were a clean people. At the present day they

never bathe at all, and such of the old baths as remain are out of order and full of grass and mud.

Thorgeir said to his brother, "Let us go now and try how Grettir will start, if I set upon him as he comes away from his bath."

"I do not like this," answered Thormod; "you will vex our host, and get no advantage over Grettir."

"I will try what I can do," said the elder; and he took his axe, hid it under his cloak, and went down towards the bathing-place.

When he had reached it he said, "Grettir, there is a talk that you have boasted that no man could make you take to your heels."

"I never said that," answered Grettir, "but anyhow you are not the man to make me run."

Then Thorgier swung up his axe and would have cut at Grettir; but Grettir suspected that the man meant mischief, and he was ready, so that the instant he drew out the axe and swung it, Grettir dashed forward at him, struck him in the chest and sent him staggering back, so that he sprawled his length on the ground.

Then Thorgeir shouted to his brother, "Why do you stand by and let this savage kill me?"

Thormod then laid hold of Grettir, and endeavoured to drag him away, but his strength was not sufficient to effect this.

At that moment up came Arison, the bonder, and he bade them be quiet and have nought to do with Grettir.

So the brothers stood up, and Thorgeir pretended it was all sport, that he had only proposed giving Grettir a fright; but the bonder hardly believed him. As for the younger of the brothers, it was well seen that he had been drawn into the matter against his will. So the winter passed, and peace was kept. This little struggle with Grettir had shown Thorgeir that it would be ill for him to have dealings with a man so prompt and strong as Grettir, and he controlled himself and did not seek to pick a quarrel with him any more. At the same time he did not like him any better. Thorgils Arison got great credit, when it was reported that throughout an entire winter he had maintained such turbulent

men as the foster-brothers and Grettir under his roof without their having fought.[1]

But when spring came then they went away, all of them, away over the heaths and moors of the interior.

When we say that Grettir was on the heaths and moors, it must not be supposed that the region so called was at all like the moors of Scotland or England. The heaths and moors of Iceland are upland desert regions with only here and there a scanty growth of vegetation, a little whortleberry, no heath at all, but vast tracts of broken stone and mud and black sand, with perhaps here and there an occasional hill of yellow sandstone. Most of the rock is perfectly black, and breaks into pieces with sharp angles. What is called Icelandic moss is a black lichen that grows on the stones, and there is a very little gray moss to be seen. Where there is a burn or a stream a little grass may grow, but the amount is small indeed.

[1] There is an entire saga relating to the history of these brothers, called the Foster-Brothers' Saga.

CHAPTER XXV.

HOW GRETTIR WAS WELL-NIGH HUNG.

NOW, after the slaying of Thorbiorn Oxmain, his kinsman Thorod took the matter up, and rode to the great assize with a large train of men.

The relatives of Grettir also appeared at the assize, and they took advice of Skapti, the law-man; and he said that Atli was slain a week before the sentence of outlawry was pronounced against Grettir, that Thorbiorn Oxmain was guilty of that, and his relatives must pay a heavy fine for the murder. But he said that Grettir was an out-law when he slew Thorbiorn. Now being an out-law he was outside the cognizance of the law, he was as one not a native of the country, as one over whom the law had no longer jurisdiction; that, therefore, his slaying of Thorbiorn could not count as expiation of the slaying of Atli; that, more-over, no suit against an outlawed man could stand

—it was illegal: that the only way in which Grettir could be brought into court was by the removal of the sentence of outlawry, when at once he could be prosecuted.

Thorod was disconcerted at this; for he could not bring an action against Grettir, and the Biarg people did now bring an action against him for the slaying of Atli, and the court gave sentence that he should pay down two hundred ounces of silver as blood fine for Atli.

Now, at this court, Snorri the judge proposed a compromise. He suggested that the fine should be let drop, and that Grettir should be held scatheless, that the outlawry should be set aside, and the slaying of Thorbiorn be put against the slaying of Atli, and so reconciliation be made.

Thorod did not at all want to pay down two hundred ounces of silver, and the Biarg family were very willing to have the outlawry done away with; so both parties were quite willing to accept this compromise, but Thorir of Garth had to be reckoned with. Grettir was outlawed at his suit for the

burning of his sons, and he must be brought to consent, or this arrangement could not take place.

But Thorir was not to be moved. In vain did the law-man Snorri urge him, and represent to him that Grettir, at large, an outlaw, was a danger menacing the country, that he was driven to desperation, Thorir absolutely refused to allow the sentence to be withdrawn. Not only so, but he said he would set a higher price on his head than had been set on the head of any outlaw before, and that was three marks of silver. Then Thorod, not to be behind with him, offered three more.

Grettir resolved to get as much out of the way of his enemies as he could, so he went into that strange excrescence, like a hand joined on by a narrow wrist to Iceland, that extends to the north-west. In this peninsula are two great masses of snow and glacier mountain, called Glam-jokull and Drang-jokull. They do not rise to any great height, hardly three thousand feet, but they are vast domes of snow, with glaciers sliding from them to the firths, and these fall over the edges of the precipitous cliffs in huge

blocks of ice that float away on the tide as icebergs. The largest of all the fiords that penetrates this region is called the Ice-firth, and it runs between these great mountains of snow and glaciers. At the extremity of the estuary the valleys are well-wooded—that is to say, well-wooded for Iceland—with birch-trees, for their valleys are very sheltered, and the sea-water that roll in bears with it a certain amount of heat, for it has been affected by the Gulf-stream.

One of these valleys is called Waterdale, and at the time of our story there lived there a man named Vermund the Slim, and his wife's name was Thorbiorg; she was a big, fine woman. Another valley is Lang-dale. Grettir went to Lang-dale—there he demanded of the farmers whatever he wanted, food and clothing, and if they would not give him what he asked, he took it. This was not to their taste at all, and they wished that they were rid of Grettir. He could not remain long in one place, so he rode along the side of the Ice-firth demanding food, and sleeping and concealing himself in the

woods. So in his course he came to the upland pastures and dairy that belonged to Vermund Slim, and he slept there many nights, and hid about in the woods.

The shepherds on the moors were afraid of him, and they ran down into the valleys and told the farmers everywhere that there was a big strange man on the heights, who took from them their curd and milk, and dried fish, and that they were afraid to resist his demands. They did not quite know what he was, whether a man or a mountain spirit.

So the farmers gathered together and took advice, and there were about thirty of them. They set a shepherd to watch Grettir's movements, and let them know when he could be fallen upon. Now, it fell out one warm day that Grettir threw himself down in a sunny spot to sleep. The glistening beech leaves were flickering behind him, the rocks were covered with the pale lemon flowers of the *dryas*, and between the clefts of the stones masses of large purple-flowered geranium stood up and made a glow of colour deep into the wood.

It is a mistake to suppose that Iceland is bare of flowers; on the contrary, there are more flowers there than grass. Beneath Grettir the turf was full of tiny deep-blue gentianellas, just as if the turf were green velvet, with a thread of blue in it coming through here and there.

The shepherd stole near enough to see that Grettir really was fast asleep, and then he ran and told the bonders, who came noiselessly to the spot. It was arranged among them that ten men should fling themselves on him, whilst the others fastened his feet with strong cords.

They made a noose, and cautiously without waking him managed to get it about his legs; then, all at once, ten of them threw themselves on his body, and tried to pin down his arms. Grettir started from his sleep, and with one toss sent the men rolling off him, and he even managed to get to his knees. Then they pulled the noose tighter and brought him down; he, however, kicked out at two, whom he tumbled head over heels, and they lay stunned on the earth. Then one after another rushed at him,



some from behind. He could not get at his weapons, which they had removed, and though he made a long and hard fight, and struggled furiously, they were too many for him, and they overcame him in the end, and bound his hands.

Now, as he lay on the grass, powerless, they held a council over him what should be done. The chief man of that district was Vermund Slim, but he was from home. So it was settled that a farmer named Helgi should take Grettir and keep him in ward till Vermund came home.

"Thank you gratefully," said Helgi; "but I have other business to attend to than to keep sentinel over this man. My hands are fully occupied without this. Not if I know it shall he cross my threshold."

So the farmers considered, and decided that another man who lived at Giorvidale should have the custody of Grettir.

"You are most obliging," said he; "but I have only my old woman with me at home, and how can we two manage him? Lay on a man only such a burden as he can bear."



They considered again, and came to the conclusion that one Therolf of Ere should have the charge of Grettir.

But he replied, "No, thank you, I am short of provisions, there is hardly food enough at my house for my own party."

Then they appointed that he should be put with another farmer; but he said, "If he had been taken in *my* land, well and good, but as he has not, I won't be encumbered with him."

Then every farmer was tried, and all had excuses why they should not have the care of Grettir; and consequently, as no one would have him, they resolved to hang him. So they set to work and constructed a rude gallows there in the wood, and a mighty clatter they made over it.

Whilst thus engaged, it happened that Thorbiorg, Vermund's wife, was riding up to her mountain dairy, attended by five servants. She was a stirring, clever woman, and when she saw so many men gathered together and making such a noise, she rode towards them to inquire what they were about.

"Who is that lying in bonds there?" she asked.

Then Grettir answered and gave his name.

"Why, now, is it, Grettir," she said, "that you have given so much trouble in this neighbourhood?"

"I must needs be somewhere," he answered. "And wherever I am, there I must have food."

"It is a piece of ill-luck that you should have fallen into the hands of these bumpkins," said she. Then turning to the farmers she asked what they purposed doing with Grettir.

"Hang him," answered they.

"I do not deny that Grettir may have deserved the rope," said Thorbiorg; "but I doubt if you are doing wisely in taking his life. He belongs to a great family, and his death will not be to your quietness and content if you kill him." Then she said to Grettir, "What will you do if your life be given you?"

"You propose the conditions," said he.

"Very well, then you must swear not to revenge on these men what they have done to you to-day, and not to do any violence more in the Ice-firth."

Grettir took the required oath, and so he was loosed from his bonds. He said afterwards that never had he a harder thing to do than to control his temper, when set free, and not to knock the farmers' heads together like nuts and crack them, for what they had done to him.

Then Thorbiorg invited him to her house, and he went with her to the Water-firth, and there abode till her husband returned, and when Vermund heard all, then he was well pleased; and deemed that his wife had acted with great prudence and kindness. He asked Grettir to remain there as long as was consistent with his safety, and Grettir accepted his hospitality, and continued there as his guest till late in the autumn, when he went south to Learwood, where was Kuggson, with whom he purposed spending the winter. However, he was not able to stay there, for it soon became known where he was, and his enemies prepared to take him. He accordingly left and went to a friend in another fiord, and remained a short while with him, but was obliged for the same reason to fly thence also; and so

he spent the winter dodging about from place to place, never able to remain long anywhere, because his enemies were so resolved on his death, and were on the alert to fall on him wherever they heard he was sheltering.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE DESERT.

THE island of Iceland is one-third larger than Ireland, but then the population is entirely confined to the coast. All the centre of the island is desert and mountain. One mighty mass of mountain covered with eternal snow and ice occupies the south of the island and approaches the sea very closely in the south-east. Much of this is unexplored; it has of recent years been traversed once, across the great Vatna-jokull, but there are passes west of the Vatna. The mountain masses are broken into three main masses. The vast Vatna-jokull is to the east, then comes a pass, and next the circular Arnafells-

jokull, then another pass, and lastly the jumble of snow mountains that form the Ball-jokull and the Lang-jokull, the Goatland and the Erick's-jokull. North of the Vatna-jokull is a vast region, as large as a big county, covered with lava broken up into bristling spikes and deep clefts of glass-like rock, which no one can possibly get across. In the midst of it, inaccessible, rise the cones of volcanoes that have poured forth this sea of molten rock. East and west of this mighty tract of broken-up lava come extensive moors also quite desert, covered with inky-black sand which has been erupted by volcanoes, burying and destroying what vegetation there was. The extent of desert may be understood when you learn that there are twenty thousand square miles of country perfectly barren and uninhabitable, and only partially explored. There are but four thousand square miles in Iceland that are inhabited; the rest of the country is a chaos of ice, desert, and volcanoes. The great lava region mentioned north of the Vatna covers one thousand one hundred and sixty square miles, and the Vatna envelopes three thousand five

hundred square miles in ice. Now, here and there in this vast region there are certain sheltered spots where some grass grows, valleys that have escaped the overflow of the molten rock, or the thrust of the glacier; and during the ninety years that Iceland had been inhabited, every now and then a churl who got tired of service, or a murderer afraid of his life, ran away into the centre of the island, and lived a precarious existence on the wild birds, their eggs, and on the fish that abounded in the countless lakes. Probably also they stole sheep, and carried them away to the mysterious recesses of the desert where they had made for themselves homes. They lived chiefly in caverns, of which there are plenty thus formed:—When the lava poured as a fiery stream out of the volcanoes, in cooling great bubbles were formed in it, sometimes these bubbles exploded, blew the fragments into the air, which fell back and made a mass of broken bits of rock like an exploded soda-water bottle; but all the bubbles did not burst, and such hardened when the rock became cool. These bubbles remain as great domed halls, and some of

them run deep underground, forming a succession of chambers. I have explored one where a band of outlaws once lived, and found numbers of sheep-bones frozen up in ice in the place where, after they had eaten the mutton, they threw away what they could not devour. At the end of the cave they had erected a wall so as to inclose a space as a store chamber.

These men, living in the desert and rarely seen, were the subject of many tales, and it was not clearly known who and what they really were, whether altogether human, or half mountain-spirits. Imagination invested them with supernatural powers.

When spring came and the snows melted, then Grettir left the farmhouse where he had been last in hiding, and went into the desert, to find food and shelter for himself.

One day he saw a man on horseback alone riding over a ridge of hill. He was a very big man, and he led another horse that had bags of goods on his back. The man wore a slouched hat so that his face could not clearly be seen.

Grettir looked hard at the horse and the goods on the pack-saddle, and thought he would probably find some of these latter serviceable to him, and in his need he was not particular how he got those things which he wanted. So he went up to the rider and peremptorily ordered him to stand and deliver.

"Why should I give you things that are my own?" asked the stranger. "I will sell some of my wares if you can pay for them."

"I have no money," answered Grettir, "what I want I take. You must have heard that by report."

"Then I know with whom I have to deal; you are Grettir the outlaw, the son of Asmund of Biarg." Thereat he struck spurs into his horse and tried to ride past.

"Nay, nay! We part not like this," said Grettir, and he laid his hands on the reins of the horse the stranger rode.

"You had better let go," said the mounted man.

"Nay, that I will not," answered Grettir.

Then the rider stooped and put his hands to the reins above those of Grettir, between them and the

bit, and he dragged them along, forcing Grettir's hands along the bridle to the end and then wrenched them out of his grasp.

Grettir looked at his palms and saw that the skin had been torn in the struggle. Then he found out that he had met with a man who was stronger than himself.

"Give me your name," said he. "For, good faith! I have not encountered a man like you."

Then the horseman laughed and sang:

"By the Caldron's side
Away I ride,
Where the waters rush and fall
Adown the crystal glacier wall
There you will find a stone
Joined to a hand—alone."

This was a puzzling answer. The meaning was that he lived near a waterfall that poured out of the Ice mountain, and that his name was Hall-mund, *hall* is a stone and *mund* is the hand.

Grettir and he parted good friends; and as he rode away Hall-mund called out to Grettir that he would

remember this meeting, and as it ended in friendliness he hoped to do him a good turn yet,—that when every other place of refuge failed he was to seek him "by the Caldron's side, where the waters rush and fall, adown the crystal glacier wall" under Ball-jokull, and there he would give him shelter.

After this Grettir went to the house of his friend the law-man Skapti, and asked his advice, and whether he would house him for the ensuing winter.

"No, friend," answered Skapti, "you have been acting somewhat lawlessly, laying hands on other men's goods, and this ill becomes a well-born man such as you. Now, it would be better for you not to rob and reive, but get your living in other fashion, even though it were poorer fare you got, and sometimes you had to go without food. I cannot house you, for I am a law-man, and it would not be proper for me who lay down the law to shelter such a notorious law-breaker as yourself. But I will give you my advice what to do. To the north of the Erick's-jokull is a tangle of lakes and streams. The lakes have never been counted they are in such

quantities, and no one knows how to find his way among them. These lakes are full of fish, and swarm with birds in summer. There is also a little creeping willow growing in the sand, and some scanty grass. It is only one hard day's ride over the waste to Biarg, so that your mother can supply you thence with those things of which you stand in absolute need, as clothing, and you can fish and kill birds for your subsistence, and will have no need to rob folk and exact food from the bonders, thereby making yourself a common object of terror and dislike. One more piece of advice I give you—Beware how you trust anyone to be with you."

Grettir thought this advice was good—only in one point was it hard for him to follow. He was haunted with these fearful dreams at night which followed the wrestle with Glam, and in the long darkness of winter the dreadful eyes stared at him from every quarter whither he turned his, so that it was unendurable for him to be alone in the dark.

Still—he went. He followed up the White River to the desert strewn with lakes from which that river

flowed, and there found himself in utter solitude and desolation.

A good map of Iceland was made in 1844, and on that fifty-three lakes are marked, but the smaller tarns were not all set down. In such a tangle of water and moor Grettir might be in comparative security. He settled himself on a spot of land that runs out into the waters of the largest of the sheets of water, which goes by the name of the Great Eagle Lake, and thereon he built himself a hovel of stones and turf, the ruins of which remain to this day, and I have examined them.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ON THE GREAT EAGLE LAKE.

GRETTIR was settled now on the Great Eagle Lake. This lake is shaped like the figure 8, only that the spot of land between the upper and lower portion of the lake does not run quite across. On one side of this spot the rock falls away precipi-

tously into the water, whereas it slopes on the other. If I had had a spade and pick, and if there had been more grass on the moor so as to allow of a longer stay, I would have dug about the foundations of Grettir's hut, and, who can tell! I might perhaps have found some relic of him. There is no record of anyone else having inhabited it since he was there, and in the middle of the 13th century, when the Saga of Grettir was committed to writing, there remained the ruins of his hut, but no one lived at the place. Now there is no human habitation for many miles; the lake was a day's journey on horseback from the nearest farm, where I had spent the night. You must get some idea of the place where now for some years Grettir was to live.

The moor is made up of rock split to fragments by the frost, and with wide tracts between the ridges of rock strewn with black volcanic ash and sand. It lies high; when I camped out there at the end of June, there was no grass visible, only angelica shoots, and a little trailing willow, so that my horses had to feed on these. The willow does not rise above the

surface of the ground, but its roots trail long distances under the surface, groping for nutriment; and for fuel one has to dig out these roots with one's fingers, and employ those which are dryest. Every dip in the moor is filled with a lake, and every lake has in it a pair of swans; in addition there are abundance of other wild fowl, and on the moor are ptarmigan that live on the flowers of the whortle or blae-berry.

Above the rolling horizon of moor, to the south rises the great snowy dome of Erick's-jokull. This is in reality a huge volcano, with precipitous sides of black lava towering up like an immense giant's castle. The great crater has been choked up with the snow of centuries, and the snow in falling had piled up a vast cupola of snow and ice standing high above the black walls, and sliding and falling over the edges in a succession of avalanches. When, at eleven o'clock at night, I looked out of my tent at Erick's-jokull, the scene was sublime. The sun had just gone under the northern horizon of snow and hill, but shone on the great dome of Erick's-jokull, turning it to the purest and most delicate rose colour,

and the walls of upright basalt that sustained the dome were of the purple of a plum. Grettir obtained nets and a boat from home, and such things as he wanted for his hut. One great advantage of his present situation was that three different roads or rather tracks led to it from Biarg, so that those who wanted to come to him from home could select their way and avoid observation, till they got among the lakes, when they were in a labyrinth in which anyone might easily be lost, and anyone could escape a pursuer. It is true that it was a long and arduous day's ride from Biarg to the Eagle Lake, but the whole of the course along each of the ways lay through uninhabited land.

Now, when other outlaws heard that Grettir was on the Eagle Lake Heath, they had a mind to join themselves to him, and Grettir was not unwilling to have a companion, so lonely did he feel on this waste, and also so fearful was he of being by himself in the dark.

There was a man called Grim, who was an outlaw; and Grettir's enemies made a bargain with him, that

he should go to the Eagle Lake Heath, pretend to be friends with Grettir, seek opportunity, and kill him. They on their side undertook, if he would do this, to get his sentence of outlawry reversed, and to furnish him liberally with money.

Accordingly he went to the moor, and after some trouble, found Grettir, and asked if he might live with him.

Grettir replied, "I do not much relish such company as yours, for you have got into outlawry through very infamous deeds. I mistrust you; nevertheless I will suffer you to remain if you work hard and be obedient. I do not want idle hands here."

Grim said he was willing, and prayed hard that he might dwell there, and carried his point. He remained with Grettir the whole of the winter; there was not much friendship between them. Grettir mistrusted him all along, and was never parted from his weapons, night or day, and Grim did not venture to attack him whilst he was awake.

But one morning, when Grim came in from fishing, he went into the hut and stamped his foot and made

a noise, seeing that Grettir lay in his bed asleep; and he was desirous to know how soundly he slept. Grettir did not start and open his eyes, but lay quite still. Then Grim made more noise, thinking that if Grettir were awake he would chide him; but Grettir made no motion. Then Grim made sure that he was fast asleep, and he stepped to his side. Now, the short sword that had been taken out of the barrow of Karr the Old hung above the bed-head. Grim leaned over Grettir and laid hold of the sword, and put both hands to it to draw it out of the sheath. At that instant Grettir started up, caught Grim round the waist and flung him backwards so that he was stunned, and the sword fell from his hand. So Grettir made him confess that he had been bribed to set on him and murder him. And then Grettir would have no more of him, and resolved to live entirely alone. Yet—directly he was alone, his dreams, and his horror of the dark, returned on him. Now, Thorir of Garth heard of an outlaw named Thorir Redbeard, a very big man, who for murder had been outlawed, and was therefore in hiding

somewhere. Thorir of Garth sent out messengers in search of him, and at last brought about a meeting, and then he offered him a great deal of money if he would kill Grettir. Redbeard said it was no easy task, for that Grettir was wise and wary.

"It is because it is no easy task that I set you to do it," said Thorir of Garth. "You are no milksop to do easy jobs."

This flattered Redbeard, and he undertook to do what was required. He came out on the Eagle Lake Heath in the autumn after that winter when Grim had been with Grettir and made the attempt on his life. Grettir was feeling uneasy and troubled, as the days grew shorter, with the eyes that he thought stared at him from every quarter, and although his judgment prompted him to refuse hospitality to Redbeard, yet his dread of being alone in the dark induced him to disregard his doubts. So he reluctantly admitted Redbeard to be an inmate of his cot.

"Now, mind this," said Grettir. "I let a man be

with me here last winter, and he lay wait for my life. If I find that you are false, then I shall not spare you."

Redbeard said he wished for nothing else; and so Grettir received him, and found him to be a very powerful man, and so energetic that he was of the greatest assistance to Grettir.

Redbeard was with him all that winter (1019–1020) and found no occasion on which he could take Grettir unawares. Then set in the next winter 1020–1021, and Redbeard had begun to loathe his life on the heath, and no wonder, for he saw no one save Grettir; the cold and desolation of the spot was surpassingly wretched. Now he became impatient to kill Grettir and get away.

One night a great storm broke over the moor whilst he and Grettir were asleep. The roar of the wind woke Redbeard and he ran outside the hut, down to the water-side, and with a huge stone he smashed the fishing-boat, so that it sank; and the oars and bits he had broken off he threw away into the lake. So did he with the nets.

When he came in Grettir was awake also, and he asked how fared the boat.

"She has broken from her mooring," answered Redbeard, "and has been dashed to bits on the rocks."

Then Grettir jumped up, and taking his weapons ran out to the end of the spit of land on which his hut was built, and saw how the nets were drifting in the waves and were entangled with the oars.

"Jump in, swim out, and bring them to shore," said he to Redbeard. The man shook his head and answered:

"I can do anything save swim. I have not held back from any other work you have set me, but swim I cannot."

Then Grettir laid his weapons down by the water-side and prepared to jump in. But he mistrusted Redbeard, so he said, "I will get in the nets, as you cannot; but I trust you will not deal treacherously by me."

Redbeard answered, "I should be a base fellow and unworthy to live if I were false to you now—after you have housed me so long."

Then Grettir put off his clothes, and went into the water, and swam out to the nets.

He swept them up together and brought them towards the land, and cast them up on the bank; but the moment he attempted to land Redbeard caught up the short sword, drew it hastily and ran at Grettir and smote at him, just as he was heaving himself up out of the water. The blade would have cut into his neck, or between his shoulder-blades, had not Grettir instantly let go, and fallen backwards into the water and sunk like a stone. Sinking thus headlong he reached the bottom, and instead of rising to the surface again he clung to the rocks under water, and groped his way along as close as he could to the bank, so that Redbeard might not see him till he had reached the back of the creek and got aland.

Now, Redbeard stood at the end of the promontory, looking into the water, much puzzled. He had not cut Grettir with the sword, and yet Grettir was gone down, and did not rise. He thought he must have struck his head against a stone, and so have

sunk, and he looked out into the water wondering where and when he would rise. Meanwhile Grettir had come ashore behind him and was approaching stealthily. Redbeard was unaware of his danger till Grettir had his arms about him, had heaved him over his head and dashed him down on the rocks, so that his skull was broken. After that Grettir resolved not to take another outlaw into his house, though he could hardly endure to be alone.

Thorir of Garth did not hear of the death of Redbeard till next summer at the great assize; and then he was so angry, and so resolved to make an end of Grettir, that he collected a body of resolute men, his servants and others whom he hired for the purpose, to the number of nearly eighty, to sweep the Eagle Lake Heath and take and kill Grettir.

One day, when Grettir was out on the moor, he saw a large body of armed men riding towards the lake. He had time to fly to a hill that rises at a little distance, where there is a rift in the rock that traverses the top of the hill. When I read the account in the saga I could not quite understand



GRETTIR ATTACKED IN THE RIFT BY THORIR'S PARTY.



what follows, but no sooner was I on the spot than all appeared quite clear. One could see, at once, that Grettir, taken by surprise, would run to this very spot and no other. It was the nearest available place of vantage, with stone and crag. The situation was not the best that might have been chosen, as it left Grettir's back unprotected; however, he had no time to seek a better.

Thorir came with his men to the bottom of the hill, and shouted to Grettir and taunted him.

Grettir replied, "Though you may have put the spoon to your lips you have not swallowed the broth."

Then Thorir egged on his men to go up the slope at Grettir, but this was not easy. It was steep, and the rocks were close on either side so that Grettir could not be surrounded. Only one man could get at him from before at once. Several attempts were made, but all failed; some of the assailants were killed, some wounded. Then Thorir broke up his party into two, and sent one detachment round to the back of the rocks, to fall on Grettir from behind.

Grettir saw the manœuvre, and did not see how to meet it. All he could do would be to sell his life dearly. He could not hold out long when assailed simultaneously from before and behind.

Thorir bade the attack slacken till he thought those sent to the rear would be ready, and then he ordered a grand, and, as he believed, a combined assault. Grettir fought with desperation, expecting every moment to be cut down from behind, but to his surprise and that of Thorir he was left unmolested in the rear.

Thorir called off his men, and went round the hill to inquire why the attack from behind had not taken place. To his amazement he came on a discomfited party bleeding, faint, and baffled, and to find that twelve men had fallen in it.[1]

Then he bade a retreat. "Oft," he said, "have I

[1] At the time, or rather shortly after I had been on the spot, I wrote, "There is a nook like a sentry-box in the side of the cleft, and it was in this that Hallmund ensconced himself, so that he could hew down anyone who attempted to pass through this cleft to get at Grettir's back, whilst remaining himself screened from observation. I could not understand the saga account before I saw the spot, and how it was that those attacking Grettir from behind did not see Hallmund. The sight of the place made all plain."

heard that Grettir is a man of marvel for prowess, but I never knew before that he was a wizard, and able to kill as many at his back as he does in front of him."

When he numbered his men, Thorir found that he had lost eighteen. Then he and his retinue rode away, and they carried on them many and grievous wounds.

Now Grettir was no less perplexed with the event than was Thorir, and when the latter had withdrawn he went through the rift in the rocks to see why he had not been fallen on from the rear,—and he lighted on a tall strong man leaning against the rocks, sore wounded.

Grettir asked his name, and the tall man replied that he was Hallmund.

"Do you remember meeting me on the heath one day?" asked the wounded man, "when you tried to stop my horse, and I pulled the reins through your hands so as to skin the palms? Then I promised if I had the chance to back you up."

"Indeed," said Grettir, much moved, "I remember

that right well, and now I thank you with all my heart, for this day you have saved my life."

Then Hallmund said, "You must now come with me, for time must drag with you solitary here on the heath."

Grettir said he was glad to accept the offer; so they went together south to the Ball-jokull, and there Hallmund had a great cave, and his daughter, a big muscular girl, lived there with him; there the girl applied plasters to the wounds of her father and healed him.

Grettir remained with them in the cave all the ensuing summer. But when summer came to an end, he wearied of being so long in the desert, and longed to see and be with his fellow-men in inhabited parts once more; so he bade farewell to Hallmund, and went away to the west to Hit-dale that opens on the Marshland, through which six or seven large rivers flow. Here he had a friend named Biorn living at Holm.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ON THE FELL.

BIORN when asked by Grettir to give him shelter declined to do so, not that the will was lacking, but that he had not the power to protect him. "You have made," he said, "enemies on all sides, and if I were to take you under my roof all your enemies would become mine also, and I would be involved in endless and bitter quarrels. I cannot give you direct assistance and shelter, but indirectly I will do what I can for you. There is a long hill, called Fairwood Fell, that runs in front of my house on the other side of the river, and ends just above the marshes. Now, in one place there is a steep shale slide, and above this is a hollow through the mountain, that might very well be made into a dry and comfortable place of abode. From the entrance every one who passes along the highway, all who come across the marshes, can be seen. I can supply you with a

few necessaries to fit the place up, but when there you must shift for yourself. I must not risk too much by supporting you."

Grettir consented to this. So he went up to Fairwood Fell and built up the cave, and hung gray wadmal before the entrance, so that no one below could notice that there was anything peculiar or anyone living there. In this eagle's nest among the rocks Grettir spent the time from the autumn of 1022 to the spring of 1024, that is, two winters. Whatever fuel he wanted, all he had to eat, everything he wanted, had to be carried up this slippery and steep ascent by him. Down the shale slide he came when short of provisions, and went over the marshes to this or that farm and demanded or carried off, sometimes a sheep, sometimes curds, dried fish, in a word what he required; and a very great nuisance the men of the district found him. Heartily did they wish they were rid of him, yet they could not drive him from his place of abode, for it was so difficult of access and so easy of defence.

Now, some years ago, in the summer of 1862,

the year after I was in Iceland, a very similar lair which Grettir inhabited a little later in the east of Iceland was explored by an Icelandic farmer. This is his description of it: "The lair stands in the lower part of a slip of stones beneath some sheer rocks. It is built up of stones, straight as a line $4\frac{3}{4}$ ells long and 10 inches wide, and is within the walls $\frac{7}{8}$ of an ell deep. Half of it is roofed over with flat stones, small thin splinters of stone are wedged in between these to fill up the joints, and these are so firmly fixed that they could not be removed without tools. One stone in the south wall is so large that it requires six men to move it. The north wall is beginning to give way. On the outside the walls are overgrown with black lichen and gray moss."

Something like this was the den of Grettir on the Fairwood Fell, but it was less built up, as he had the natural rock for two of the sides and for the roof.

Whilst Grettir was there, there came a ship into harbour, in which was a man named Gisli, a merchant, very fond of wearing smart clothes, and an inordinately vain man. He heard the farmers talking about

Grettir, and what a vexation it was to them to have him in their neighbourhood.

"Don't talk to me about Grettir," said Gisli; "I've had battles with harder men than he. I hope he may came in my way, that I may dress his skin for him."

The farmer to whom he said this shook his head. "You don't know of whom you are speaking. If you were to kill him you would be well off,—six marks of silver were set on his head, and Thorir of Garth has added three more, so that there stand on him nine marks of silver."

"All things can be done for money," said Gisli; "and as I am a merchant I'll see to it. And when we meet—I'll dress his skin for him."

The farmer said it would be well not to talk about the matter. Gisli agreed. "I will abide this winter in Snowfell-ness," he said. "If his lair is on my road thither I'll look out for him, and dress his skin as I go along."

Now, whether he talked in spite of the caution given him, or whether some one overheard what he said, who

was a friend of Biorn of Holm, is uncertain. Anyhow Gisli's threat reached the ears of Biorn, who at once warned Grettir to be on his guard against the merchant.

"If he comes your way," said Biorn, "teach him a lesson; but don't kill him."

"No," said Grettir with a grim smile, "I'll merely dress his skin for him."

Now it happened one day that Grettir was looking out of the entrance to his lair, when he saw a man with two attendants riding along the highway. His kirtle was of scarlet, and his helmet and shield flashed in the sun. Then it occurred to him that this must be the dandified Gisli, of whom he had heard, so he came running down the shale descent to the road. He reached the man, and at once he went to his horse, clapped his hand on a bundle of clothes behind the saddle, and said, "This I am going to take."

"Nay, not so," answered Gisli, for it was he. "You do not know whom you are addressing."

"Nor do I care," said Grettir. "I have little respect for persons. I am in poor and lowly con-

dition myself, so low that I am driven to be a highway robber."

Then Gisli drew his sword, and called to his men to attack Grettir, who gave way a little before them. But he soon saw that Gisli kept behind his servants, and never risked himself where the blows fell; so Grettir put the two churls aside with well-dealt strokes, and went direct upon the merchant, who, seeing that he was menaced, turned and took to his heels. Grettir pursued him, and Gisli in his fear cast aside his shield, then, a little further, threw away his helmet, and so as he ran he cast away one thing after another that he had with him. There was a heavy purse of silver at his girdle. This encumbered him, and as he ran he unbuckled his belt and dropped it and the purse with it. Grettir did not purposely come up with him; he could had outstripped him had he willed, but he let the fellow run a couple of horse lengths before him. The end of the Fell is above an old lava bed that has flowed from a crater called Eldborg or the Castle of Fire, and like an old ruined castle it looks. Gisli ran over

this lava bed, jumping the cracks, then dived through a wood of birch that intervened between the lava and the river Haf. The stream was swollen with ice, and ill to ford. Gisli halted hesitating before plunging in, and that allowed Grettir to run in on him, seize him and throw him down.

"Are you the Gisli who were so eager to meet Grettir Asmund's son?" asked the outlaw.

"I have had enough of him," gasped the fallen man. "Keep my saddle-bags and what I have thrown away, and let me go free."

"Hardly yet," said Grettir grimly. "I think something was said about skin-dressing, that is not to be overlooked."

Then Grettir drew him back to the wood, took a good handful of birch rods, pulled Gisli's clothes up over his head, and laid the twigs against his back in none of the gentlest fashion. Gisli danced and skipped about, but Grettir had him by his garments twisted about his head and neck, and continued to flog till the poor fellow threw himself down on the ground screaming. Then Grettir let go, and went

quietly back to his lair, picking up as he went the purse and the belt, the shield, casque, and whatever else Gisli had thrown away, also he had the contents of his saddle-bags.

Gisli never came back to Fairwood Fell to ask for them. When he got on his legs he ran up the river to where it was not so dangerous, swam it, and reached a farmhouse, where he entreated to be taken in. There he lay a week with his body swollen and striped; after which he went home, and much was he laughed at for his adventure with Grettir.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FIGHT ON THE RIVER.

NOW, whilst Grettir was on Fairwood Fell, favoured by Biorn of Hit-dale, his presence after a while became unendurable to the bonders who lived in the marshes. He had been for two winters in his den on the hill, and when they saw that he

intended to remain there a third winter, and rob them of sheep and whatever he needed, then they took counsel together how they might rid themselves of the annoyance.

One day in the winter of 1023, Grettir came down from his place of vantage, and went over the marshes to a farm called Acres, and drove away from it two bullocks fit for slaughtering, and several sheep, and he had got on with them some way over the marshes, on his way to his lair, before the farmer at Acres was aware of his loss; he had taken six wethers beside from another farm named Brookbend. This angered the farmers greatly, and they sent a message to the chief man of the district, Thord at Hitness, and urged him to waylay Grettir before he could reach his den. Thord shrank from doing anything; however, they pressed him so much that at last he consented to let his son Arnor go with them. Then messengers were sent throughout all the country side, to every farmer who was concerned. And it was so planned that two bodies of men should march to the taking of Grettir, one on

the right, the other on the left bank of the Hit River, so as to take him for certain.

Grettir was soon aware that the country was roused. He was not alone, he had two men with him —one the son of the farmer at Fairwood Fell, with whom he was on good terms, the other a farm-servant. They advised him to desert the cattle and sheep and run for it, cross the river and take refuge in his place of vantage; but this Grettir was too proud to do.

Presently he could see coming on behind him a large band of men, about twenty in all, under Thorarin of Acres and Thorfin of Brookbend. Now, as these were pursuing him over the marshes, up the opposite side of the river came Arnor, the son of Thord of Hitness, and with him a farmer named Biarni of Jorvi.

Grettir managed to reach the river before his enemies came up with him, and he had also time to secure a place of vantage. This was a ness of rock that ran out into the river, or round which the river swept, so that he was protected by the water on all

sides but one. Grettir said to the two men with him, that they must guard his back, see that none came up the sides in his rear, and then he took his short-sword in both his hands, planted his feet wide apart on the rock, and prepared to sell his life dear.

The party headed by Thorarin of Acres and Thorfin of Brookbend came up, twenty in all,—but more were coming, for Thorarin had begun the pursuit before all the farmers were collected, and he knew that a body of some twenty or thirty more would arrive before long. Thorarin himself was an old man, and he did not enter into the fray, but urged on his men.

The fight was hard. Grettir was not easily reached where he stood, and he smote at all who approached. Some of the Marshmen fell, and several were wounded. In vain did they attempt to dislodge him by combined rushes, he drove them over the edge into the water, or cut them down with his sword. At last his arm was weary, and he called to the farmer's son to step into his place. He did so, and held the ground valiantly, whilst Grettir

rested. Then the party drew back, discomfited. At that moment up came the fresh body of men under Thrand, the brother of Thorarin of Acres, and Stone-wolf of Lavadale. These egged on their men eagerly, and they thought they would obtain an easy victory, for Grettir had been fighting for some time, and was weary.

Then Thorarin of Acres called out and advised delay.

"For," said he, "the third party of men under Arnor and Biarni of Jorvi have not come up on the other side of the river."

This piece of advice was rejected by the new-comers. What did they want with more men? They were a large party, fresh and untired, and Grettir had but two men with him, and they were wearied with fighting. So the signal was given for the onslaught.

Then Grettir saw that he must either jump into the river, swim across, and desert the sheep and bullocks he had driven there, or use almost super-human exertions to defend himself.

His position was, indeed, desperate; for, even if he did hold his own against this second body of men, a third was on its way up the other bank of the river to intercept him on his way up to the Fell. For one moment he hesitated, and then was resolved. No, he would not run. He would die there, and die only after having strewn the ground with his foes. Foremost among his assailants was Stonewolf of Lavadale, and Grettir made a sudden rush at him, and with a tremendous stroke of his sword he clove his head down to the shoulders. Thrand, who sprang forward to avenge him, Grettir struck on the thigh, and the blow took off all the muscle, and he fell, crippled for life. Then Grettir fell back to his place of safety, and dared others to come on. They sprang out on the neck of rock, but would not meet his weapon, one after another fell or was beaten back.

Then Thorarin cried out, and bade all draw off.

"The longer ye fight," said he, "the worse ye fare. He picks out what men among you he chooses."



The party withdrew, and there were ten men fallen, and five had received mortal wounds, or were crippled; and hardly one of the two parties was without some hurt or other.

Grettir, moreover, was marvellously wearied, but had received no wounds to speak of.

Now, hardly had the men withdrawn, carrying their dead and wounded, than up came the third detachment under Arnor and Biarni, on the other side of the river. There can be no question but that, had they crossed and fallen on Grettir, he could not have defended himself longer, so overcome was he with weariness; but Arnor knew that his father had entered on the matter reluctantly, and he was discouraged by the ill-success of the other companies. Consequently, he neither waded through the river at the ford, a little higher, nor did he maintain his ground and cut off Grettir's retreat. Instead, he withdrew with all his men, and left Grettir to recover his strength, and cross and escape to the Fell. This conduct of Arnor provoked much comment; and he was accused of cowardice, an accusation that

clung to him through life. Even his father rebuked him, for the father saw what discredit he had brought upon himself.

The point on the river Hit where this affray took place is still shown; and is called Grettir's-point to this day.

When the fight was over Grettir and the two men went to the Fell, and as they passed the farm the farmer's daughter came out of the door, and asked for tidings.

Then Grettir sang:—

"Brewer of strong barley-corn,
Pourer forth of drinking-horn,
Lo! to-day the Stonewolf fell,
Ne'er again his head be well.
Many more have got their bane,
Many in their blood lie slain;
Little life has Thorgils now,
After that bone-breaking blow.
Eight upon the river's bank
In their gore expiring sank."

CHAPTER XXX.

A MYSTERIOUS VALE.

IN the spring of 1024 Grettir went away from Fairwood Fell; for he had been there so long, and had preyed for such a time on the bonders of the marshes, that he himself saw that it would be best for him to remove into quite another part of the island. So he visited his friend Hallmund once more, under the ice of Ball-jokull, and Hallmund advised him where to go. He could not give him hospitality himself that winter, because his stock of goods was run so short that it would hardly suffice for his daughter and himself; but he told him of a valley unknown to anyone, save a friend of his called Thorir and himself. And he informed him how it was to be reached.

Now, as already said, there are passes in Iceland between the several blocks of ice mountains, and such a pass exists between Goatland-jokull and a curious domed snowy mountain called Ok. The

pass is called the Cold Dale, because it lies for many hours ride between ice mountains, and under the precipitous Goatland-jokull, whose rocks are crowned with green ice that falls over incessantly in great avalanches. It is seven hours' ride from one blade of grass to another through that dale. I went through it on midsummer-day, and saw the bones of horses lying about that had died unable to get through; perhaps becoming lame or exhausted on the way.

Half through this long trough of the Cold Dale stands up a buttress of rock, or rather a sort of ness, projecting from Goatland-jokull, so precipitous that hardly any snow rests on it, and this is called the Half-way Fell.

Now, Hallmund told Grettir he must go through the Cold Dale till he reached the Half-way Fell, and there he must strike up over the snow and glaciers of Goatland-jokull, due south, and he would all at once drop into a valley known to few.

So Grettir went up the moor till he struck the White River, that flowed out of the Eagle Lakes he knew so well, and under the cliffs and icy crown of

Erick's-jokull, then he climbed over broken trachyte rocks for several hundreds of feet, till he found himself in the Cold Dale, and along that he trudged till he had reached Half-way Fell, standing up like a wall as though to stop the pass. There he turned to the left, and as at this point Goatland is no longer precipitous, but slopes in a series of steps to the Cold Dale, he climbed up through the snow, a long and tedious ascent, till he stood on the neck of the mountain, and there he saw that the snow slopes fell away rapidly to the south, and he descended and soon beheld before him a valley in which were a great many boiling springs that threw up clouds of steam, and he saw also, what greatly pleased him, that there was rich and abundant grass in this valley. This is what the saga says: "The dale was long and somewhat narrow, locked up by glaciers all round, in such a manner that the ice walls overhung the dale. He scrambled down into it, as best he could, and there he saw fair hillsides grass-grown and set with bushes. Hot springs were there, and it appeared to him that it was the earth-

fires which prevented the ice walls from closing in on the valley. A little river ran down the dale, with level banks. The sun rarely shone into the valley; but the number of sheep there could hardly be reckoned, they were so many; and nowhere had he seen any so fat and in such good condition."

Grettir did not see Thorir, Hallmund's friend, at first; so he built himself a hut of such wood as he could get, and with turf. He killed the sheep he wanted, and found that there was more meat on one of them than on two elsewhere.

The Saga says:—

"There was one ewe there, brown mottled, with a lamb, and she was a beauty. Grettir killed the lamb, and took three stone of suet off it, the meat was some of the best he had ever eaten. But when the mottled ewe missed her lamb, she went up on Grettir's hut every night, and bleated so plaintively as to trouble his sleep, and made Grettir quite troubled that he had killed her lamb."

Now Grettir noticed that at evening the sheep ran in one direction, and once or twice he heard a

call; so he went after the sheep one evening, and was led by them to the hut where Thorir dwelt. He was a strange man, who had spent so many years away from the society of his fellow-men as not to care any more to meet them, so he did not welcome Grettir very warmly. However he had three daughters, and they were glad to have someone to talk to, and as the winter crept on Thorir himself became more amiable, and so the winter did not pass as drearily as Grettir had feared it would. He sang his songs and related stories, and the party played draughts with knuckle-bones of sheep.

When spring came, however, he was fain to go; and he did not leave by the way he came, but followed the little river, and it led him out between rock and glaciers into a piece of desert, covered with lava beds that have poured out of a volcano, or rather two that stand opposite this entrance to Thorir's valley. These two volcanoes are quite unlike each other, though side by side, one, called Hlothufell has upright walls, like Erick's-jokull, and a crater filled up and brimming over with ice; but

the other Skialdbreith, or the Broad-shield, is like a conical round silver shield laid on the ground. The entrance to Thorir's Dale is completely hidden by a round snowy mountain that blocks it, and then a second snowy mountain stands further out in front of the opening, so that not a sign of any valley can be seen from anywhere.

So difficult did Grettir think it would be to find it, that he ascended on Broad-shield and set up a stone there with a hole in it, so that anyone looking through this hole would see directly into the narrow entrance of Thorir's Dale. This stone still stands where Grettir had placed it; but has sunk on one side, so that by looking through the hole the eye is no longer directed to the entrance.

No one had ever visited Thorir's Dale since Grettir left it till the year 1654, when it was explored by two Icelandic clergymen, and an account of their expedition in Icelandic is to be found in the British Museum.[1] The valley as far as I know has not

[1] I have given a translation of it in my *Curiosities of Olden Times*, London, Hayes, 1869.

been explored since. It is marked on the map of Iceland, but apparently from the description left by the two clergymen, not from any visit made to it by the map-maker.

When the two men visited the valley they went to it in the same way as did Grettir. They found no hot springs, and the valley was utterly barren; but then they had no time to descend it, they only looked down on it from above. They found the cave with a door, and a window to it, which was probably the habitation of Thorir and his daughters.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DEATH OF HALLMUND.

NOW, there was a man called Grim, who was an outlaw for his ill-deeds, and he thought that as Grettir no longer abode in his hut on the Eagle Lake, he might go there and occupy it. This did not please Hallmund, for Grettir had left him his nets, and he was wont to fish in the lake.

Grim had supplied himself with nets, and he one day caught a hundred char, large red-fleshed fish, delicious eating; so he piled them up outside his hut. Next morning to his great surprise all his char had disappeared. Then he went fishing again, and caught even more fish, and he brought them to land, and heaped them up as before.

Next morning they also had disappeared.

He could not understand it; so he fished again, and had on this occasion extraordinary luck: he must have netted nearly three hundred fish. He brought them home, and put them in the same place as before; but he did not go to sleep this time: he remained within, and watched his store through a peep-hole in the door.

During the night he heard someone who trod heavily coming along the ness, and then he saw a man picking up his fish, and putting them into a basket he had on his back. Grim watched till he had filled the basket, which he now heaved upon his shoulders. Instantly Grim threw open the door, rushed out, and whilst the man was still stoop-

ing adjusting his load, he swung up a very sharp axe he held, holding it in both hands, and smote at the man's neck. The axe hit the basket, and that somewhat broke its force, but it glanced aside and sank into the shoulder. Then the man started aside, and set off running with the basket to the south, skirting a lava field that had flowed out of Erick's-jokull, and which now goes by the name of Hallmund's Lava-bed.

Grim ran after him, and saw that he was making for Ball-jokull; but the man, who was of great size and strength, though wounded and losing blood, ran on, and did not stay till he reached a cave in the face of the cliff, above which was the ice, and with long icicles hanging over the front. Into this he entered. There was a fire burning inside, and a young woman sitting by it.

Grim heard her welcome the man, and call him her father, and name him Hallmund. He cast his basket of fish down, and groaned aloud.

Then the girl saw that blood was flowing from him, and she asked him what had happened.

Hallmund told what had befallen him, and said that he was wounded to the death, and that he trusted Grettir would avenge him, for he had no other friend to do so.

After that Hallmund began a lay, and sang the history of his life, the achievements he had wrought, and he sang on till his breath failed, and either he was unable to finish his lay, or Grim could not remember all of it. A good deal, however, of Hallmund's death-song has been retained and is given in the saga.

But Hallmund's hope or expectation that Grettir would avenge him was disappointed, for Grim managed to get away from Iceland, and did not return to it again during the lifetime of Grettir.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OF ANOTHER ATTEMPT AGAINST GRETTIR.

NOW, during the summer, tidings came to Thorir of Garth that Grettir was somewhere about on Reekheath in the north-east. There was his lair

which was examined a few years ago, and which remains in tolerable condition, as already mentioned when his lair at Fairwood Fell was described. Now, Thorir of Garth, when he got this tidings was resolved to make another attempt to kill him; and no wonder, for with singular audacity Grettir had come into his neighbourhood. Grettir no doubt thought that he had preyed long enough on men who had not harmed him, and that now he would prey on the goods and cattle of the man who had made an outlaw of him, and who pursued him with such remorseless hostility. Thorir gathered a number of men together and went in pursuit of Grettir. Grettir was not at that time in his den but out on the moor, and he was near a mountain-dairy that stood back somewhat from the wayside, and there was another man with him, when they spied the party of Thorir, all armed, coming along. They had not been observed, so they hastily led their horses into the shed attached to the dairy, and concealed themselves. Thorir came along, went to the dairy, looked about to see if anyone were there who could

inform him if Grettir had been seen, noticed only a couple of horses tied up, but supposed they belonged to the farmer whose summer dairy this was, and, without looking further, went on.

As soon as Thorir and his band had gone out of sight, Grettir crept from his place of hiding, and said to his companion:

"It is a pity they should have come such a ride to see me, and should be disappointed. You watch the horses, and I will go on and have a word with them."

"You surely will not be so rash?" exclaimed the other man.

"I cannot let them come all this way without exchanging words with me," said Grettir, and leaving the horses under the care of his comrade, he strode away over the moor to a place where he was sure he could be observed. Now, Grettir had a slouched hat on and a long staff in his hand, and at the dairy he had found some clothes belonging to the herdsman usually there, and these he had put on.

Directly Thorir and his party saw a man with a

staff striding about on the moor they rode to him. None of them knew Grettir's face, for, indeed, they had not been given the chance. So they thought this great rough man was the herdsman, and they asked him if he had seen the outlaw Grettir.

"What sort of man is he?" asked Grettir. "Is he armed?"

"Armed indeed is he, with a casque on his head, a long sword, and also a short one in his girdle."

"Is he riding?"

"Most certainly he is."

"Then," said Grettir, "you had better get you along after him due south; he has gone that way not so long agone."

When they heard this Thorir and his party struck spurs into their horses, put them into a gallop, and away they went as hard as they could in the direction indicated. Now, Grettir knew the country very well, and he was well aware that south of where he stood were impassable bogs. Thorir and his fellows were too eager in pursuit to attend to the nature of the ground over which they rode; besides, they

thought that if Grettir had ridden that way they could ride it as well. They were speedily mistaken, for in they floundered into a bottomless morass; some of the horses were in to their saddles; the men got off and got out with difficulty, and they had much ado to get their horses out at all. Indeed, some were wallowing there more than half the day. Many curses were heaped on the churl who had befooled them, but they could not find him when the went after him to chastise him.

Grettir hastened back to the dairy, mounted his horse, and rode to Garth itself, whilst the master was floundering in the bog. As he came to the farm he saw a tall, well-dressed girl by the door, and he asked who she was. He was told this was Thorir's daughter. Then Grettir sang a stave to her, the meaning of which was that he who came there was the man whom Thorir was vainly pursuing.

Much laughter was occasioned by this failure of Thorir to take Grettir when he was in his own neighbourhood, and by his being so deceived and befooled by Grettir when he had him in his power.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT SANDHEAPS.

THE summer was passing away, and Grettir could not remain without shelter through the winter; so he considered what was best to be done. He could not ask any farmer in the north-east to shelter him, because they were all afraid of Thorir of Garth, who would have pursued with implacable animosity the man who befriended and housed the outlaw. Moreover, Thorir had his spies everywhere, and Grettir found he had to shift quarters repeatedly to escape his deadly enemy.

Now, when the first snows fell Grettir sent his man away with his horses across country to Biarg, and he went further away from where Thorir was; but never stayed long anywhere, nor gave his real name. He had no relatives in this part of the island, and no friends.

Now, a little before Yule—that is Christmas—he came to a farm called Sandheaps, on that river

which is called the Quivering Flood. This farm belonged to a widow woman called Steinvor, who had recently lost her husband.

Grettir came and offered his services; he said his name was Guest, that he was out of work, and that he had come there because he heard she was short of hands.

Steinvor looked at him, and saw that he was a very powerfully-built man, and that there was a certain dignity and nobility in his face; so she accepted him, against the opinion of the rest in the house, who were frightened at the appearance of Grettir, and did not know what to make of him, whether he were an ordinary human being or a wild man, half mountain-goblin or troll.

It came to pass on Christmas-eve that the widow Steinvor was very desirous to go to church, but the church was on the further side of the river, and there was no bridge.

Grettir heard Steinvor lament that she could not go to church, so he said bluntly: "You can go. I will attend you and see you over the water."

Then she made ready for worship, and took her little daughter with her. Now, at times the river froze hard across, and then it was possible to cross on the ice. At other times it might be traversed at a ford. But when Grettir came to the side of the Quivering Flood, it was plain to him that by the ice the water could not be crossed. For there had been a rapid thaw, and now the river was overflowed and very full of water; and, moreover, it was rolling down great masses of ice.

When Steinvor saw the condition of the river, she said, "There is plainly no way across for horse or man."

"I suppose there is a ford somewhere," said Grettir.

"Yes," answered Steinvor, "there is a ford at this place; but I do not see how it is to be traversed."

"I will carry you across," said Grettir.

"Carry over the little maiden first," said the widow. "She is the lightest."

"I don't care about making two journeys when



FORDING THE QUIVERING FLOOD.



one will suffice," answered Grettir. "Come, jump up; I will carry you in my arms."

The widow crossed herself, and said, "That will never do. How can you manage such a burden?"

But without more ado Grettir caught up Steinvor on his arm, and then he picked up the little girl and set her on her mother's lap, and strode into the water; they were on his left arm, but he kept the right free. They were so frightened that they durst not cry out. He waded on in the river, and the water foamed up to his breast; and then he saw a great ice-floe coming bearing down upon him. He put out his right hand, gave the mass of ice a thrust, and it was whirled past them by the current. Then he waded further, and the water washed about his shoulders, and that was the deepest point. After that the river shallowed, and he bore the mother and child safely to the shore and set them down.

Now Grettir turned to go back, and he took up a great stone and set it on his head, and so waded back. If he had tried to go through the water without a stone he would have been washed away;

but the great stone on his head enabled him to stand firm and resist the current of the water. Those who have not been through an Icelanic river can hardly imagine the intensity of the cold. I have ridden through these rivers, my horse swimming under me, and when I reached the further side have thrown myself off and lain on the sand for a quarter of an hour before I could recover from the numbness caused by the deadly cold; for some of these rivers are as broad as the Thames at London Bridge, and the water is milky because full of undissolved snow.

When Steinvor reached the church every one was astonished to see her, and asked how she had managed to get across the Quivering Flood. But when the priest heard the story, he called Steinvor aside, and said:

"Mind and do not say too much about your new man; do not talk about his strength, and set folk a-wondering who he may be. I have my own opinion, and I think you will do well to house him, and say nothing to anyone about his being in any way remarkable."

And now there comes into the saga of Grettir a story which is certainly untrue, but *how* it comes in can be made out pretty easily.

The real truth was, as the saga writer confesses, that Grettir remained hidden at Sandheaps all that winter, and no one in the country round knew that he was there. But then, the saga writer did not feel satisfied with such a dull winter, in which nothing happened; so, to fill out his story and say something interesting, he worked into his history a wonderful tale. The story, which I tell in my own words, is this:—

The Story of the Stream-Troll.

There is on the Quivering Flood some miles below Sandheaps a mighty foss, or waterfall. The whole river pours over a ledge in a thundering, magnificent cascade. The stream in the middle is broken by an island. You can hear the roar of the falling water for a long way around, and see the spray thrown up from the fall like a cloud or column of steam rising high into the air. This waterfall is



called Goda-foss, and was long supposed to be the finest in the island; but there is another, which I was the first to see, on the Jokull-river, called Detti-foss, which is infinitely finer, but which is in a region of utter desert of sand and volcanic crater, many miles from any human habitation.

It happens that there is a curious black lava rock standing near the river, higher up than the fall, which bears a quaint resemblance to an old woman, and this stone is called The Old Hag; and the story goes that it is a troll-woman turned to stone.

Now, you must know that throughout Norway and Iceland, and, indeed, wherever the Scandinavian race is found, a superstition exists that every river has its spirit, that lives in the river; and it was held that these river-spirits demanded a sacrifice of a human life, at least once a year. If a sacrifice were not given to them, then they took some man or woman, when crossing the water, and carried the victim away. And in heathen times there can be no doubt whatever that human sacrifices were offered to every river; generally an evildoer or a

prisoner was thrown in and drowned, to propitiate the Stream-churl, as he was called, so that he should not snap at and carry off other and more valuable lives. Wherever there was a cataract, there the Stream-churl was believed to live, hidden away behind the curtain of falling water. If the stream was small, then this spirit or demon was small; if, however, it were a mighty river, then the spirit was a great troll or giant. Even to this day in Iceland and Norway, the ignorant and superstitious believe that there are these Stream-churls, and tell stories about them, and cannot but suspect that, when anyone is drowned, it is the Stream-churl exacting his toll.

Now, it is quite certain that Steinvor, although she was a Christian, believed in there being a great Stream-churl living under Goda-foss; and as she had lost her husband and one of her servants who had been drowned in the Quivering Flood, she held that they had been carried off by the Troll of the waterfall.

There had been, as it happened, something mys-

terious about the death of Steinvor's husband. Two years before Grettir came to Sandheaps, on Christmas-eve, he had disappeared. She had gone off to see some friends at a distance, and when she returned home next day she heard that her husband had not been seen—he was gone, and not a trace of him remained. It occurred to her that in all probability he had gone across the river to church, and had been carried off by the river—that is, by the Stream-churl. But she could be certain of nothing, and she was greatly distressed because she could not give his body burial. A year passed and not a word about her husband could she hear. His body had not be found anywhere washed up by the river, supposing he had been drowned.

Next year she lost one of her men-servants in the same way. He vanished, and none knew how or whither he had gone. If he had run away, she would probably have had tidings of him; but she heard none, and his body was also never found.

I have no doubt that she told Grettir about this, and also that she believed that the Stream-churl

who lived under Goda-foss had carried off both her husband and the servant. I believe also that, to satisfy her, Grettir undertook to look, and that he actually dived under the fall, and came up and searched between the sheet of falling water and the rock, and found—nothing.

That is the foundation of a wonderful story which has found its way into the saga. It did not satisfy those who told the tale of Grettir that he should have spent the winter at Sandheaps and done nothing—that he should have dived under Goda-foss and found nothing.

So by degrees old nursery tales got mixed up with this incident about Grettir's search for the Stream-churl, and all was worked into a wonderful story, which you shall hear.

On that night on which Grettir had carried Steinvor across the river, he returned to the farm, and lay down in his bed.

When midnight arrived, then a great din was heard outside, and presently the hall door was thrown open and in through it came a gigantic woman, a

Troll-wife, with a trough in one hand and a huge chopper in the other.

As she entered she peered about her, and saw Grettir where he lay, and she ran at him. Then he jumped up and went to meet her, and they fell a-wrestling terribly, and struggled together so furiously, that all the panelling of the hall side was broken.

She was the stronger, and she dragged Grettir towards the door, and forth towards the entrance, in spite of all his efforts. She had got him as far as the entrance, when there he made a final struggle, and in the struggle the door-posts and fittings were torn from their place, and fell outwards.

Then the Troll-woman laboured away with him towards the river, and right down towards the gulfs.

Grettir was exceedingly weary, yet he saw that his only chance was to make a last effort, or be flung by her over the edge into the deep, boiling river.

All night they contended in such fashion, and ever was he drawing nearer to the edge. But just

as she was preparing to fling him into the water, he got his right hand free, and he swiftly seized his short-sword, and struck off her arm; and at that moment the sun rose, and the Troll-woman was turned into stone. There she stands with her amputated arm-socket, as a mass of black basalt or lava to this day.

If the reader will recall the story of Grettir's struggle with Glam at Thorod's-stead, in the valley of Shadows, he will see that this is only the same story over again almost in every particular,—except that the first fight was with a man, and this is with a woman. The *reason* why this story was concocted and put in here, was to account for the stone figure which stands by the river, and which is called the Troll-wife. So far the story carries its character on its face.

Now we will go on to the next part of the tale. It did not satisfy people that Grettir should have dived under Goda-foss and found nothing, so the story was thus told:

When the goodwife, Steinvor, came from church,

she thought that her house had been rudely handled; so she went to Grettir and asked him what had occurred. Then he told her all, and she prayed him to go and make a search for her husband's bones, under Goda-foss.

Grettir consented, but he asked that the priest might be sent for. His name was Stone. Steinvor sent for him, and Stone was curious to know whether his suspicions about this stranger were true. So he asked him questions, but Grettir answered that if the priest wanted to know who he was, he must find out. The priest laughed at the story of the Troll-wife, and said he did not believe a word about the struggle.

Then Grettir said, "Well, priest, I see that you have no faith in my tale; now I propose that you accompany me to Goda-foss, and we will search for the Troll himself, and see if we can recover the bones of Steinvor's husband."

The priest, Stone, agreed, and they went together to the side of the waterfall, and they had a rope with them.

Stone shook his head, and he said, "It would be too risky for anyone to venture down there."

"I will go," said Grettir. "But you mind the rope."

The priest drove a peg into the sward on the cliff, and heaped stones over it, so as to make the end firm, and then he seated himself by the heap.

Then Grettir made a loop in the end of the rope, and put a stone through the loop, and threw the stone down, and the end of the rope went to the bottom of the gulf.

"How are you going down?" asked Stone.

"I shall dive," said Grettir.

Then he stripped, but girt on a short-sword, and so leaped off the cliff into the foss. The priest saw only the soles of his feet as he went into the water, and then saw no more.

Now, Grettir had gone in below the fall, and he dived and went under the curtain of water and came up near the rock. The whirlpool below the falls was so strong that he had a desperate struggle with the water before he could reach the rock.

When he rose, he saw that the water fell over a lip of rock, quite clear, and that in the face of the rock was a cavern, and that smoke issued from this cave, and mingling with the spray and foam passed away, and was not discerned beyond.

Grettir climbed over the stones into the cave, and there he saw a great fire flaming from amidst brands of drift-wood; and there was the Stream-churl seated there, a great Troll with a hideous face. When he saw Grettir he roared and jumped up, and caught a glaive that was near him, and smote at the new-comer. Grettir hewed back at him with his short-sword, and smote the handle of the glaive and broke it. Then the giant stretched back for a sword that hung up to a peg against the side of the cave, but as he was thus leaning back Grettir smote him across the breast, and cut through to the ribs, and gashed open his belly. The blood poured forth out of the cave and mingled with the stream. When the priest saw the bloody foam beneath the fall, he was so frightened that he ran away, for he made sure that Grettir was dead.

Grettir remained in the cave, standing across the giant, till he had killed him. Then he took up a flaming brand and searched the cave through. He found nothing more than dead men's bones, and these he put together into a bag, threw that over his shoulder, and went again into the water.

He rose beyond the foss and looked up, but could see nothing of the priest; so he caught the rope, and by means of that he swarmed up to the top of the cliff.

Then he sat down, and with a sharp knife he cut runes on a staff. And what he wrote was this:

"Down into the gulf I went,
Where the rocks are widely rent;
Where the swirling waters fall
O'er the black basaltic wall;
Where, with voice of thunder, leap
In the foaming darkling deep.
There the stream with icy wave
Washes the grim giant's cave."

He had cut as much as he could on one stick, so now he took another, and on that he cut:

"Dreadful dweller in the cave
Underneath the falling wave,
Fierce at me he brandished glaive;
Full of rage at me he drove,
Desperate we together strove.
Lo! I smote his halft in twain,
Lo! I smote and he was slain,
Bleeding from each riven vein."

Then Grettir carried the bag of bones and the staves to the church, and laid them in the porch.

Next morning when the priest came to the church he found the bag of bones and the staves.

Such is the story.

Now, it is clear that a good bit of it is simply transferred from the story of Grettir going down into the cairn of Karr the Old.

The real truth of the tale is no more than what has been stated, that Grettir went under the waterfall and found nothing. It is, of course, possible that he may have hoaxed the priest; but I think it more probable that all this marvellous matter is simply tacked on to one simple fact, and that it was taken, partly from the story of Grettir in the barrow

of Karr, and partly from that of his struggle with Glam.

What the saga writer does admit is that the versions of the story do not quite agree, and that—in spite of this wonderful achievement, folks did not know that Grettir was at Sandheaps that winter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

HOW GRETTIR WAS DRIVEN ABOUT.

AFTER a while rumours reached Thorir of Garth that either Grettir, or someone very like Grettir,—a tall, powerful man with reddish hair, and one who gave no account of whence he came,—was lodging at Sandheaps, and Thorir made ready to go there after him. Fortunately Grettir, or rather the housewife Steinvor, heard of his intention, and so Grettir made off out of the valley of the Quivering Flood before Thorir came there in quest of him.

He escaped to Maddervales, in the Horg-river

Dale. This is a noble valley of the Horg River, with chains of snowy peaks on each side, of peculiar shape, barred with precipices of basalt, on which lie slopes of snow.

Some way up this valley are some very remarkable spires of basaltic rock, one of which that is like a needle is said to have been climbed by Grettir whilst staying in this valley. It is not so said in the saga, but I was told so on the spot, and the tale goes that when he climbed to the top he slipped his belt round the needle, and there it hangs round it still—but no one has been up since to find if it be there where he left it.

He could not remain long there, for Gudmund the Rich, who was farmer at Maddervales, was afraid to house him for long. Thorir of Garth would come and burn his house if he harboured Grettir. However, he kept him for some little while, and then he gave him advice what he should do.

It had come to such a pass with Grettir now that no one dared to shelter him for long, and Thorir had spies everywhere to inform him where Grettir was.

Gudmund the Rich said to Grettir: "You can find no safety anywhere that men dwell; for if there be not treachery, yet the news flies about that you are there. So I advise you to go where you shall be alone."

"Where shall I go?" asked Grettir. "I am hunted like a dog."

"There is an island," answered Gudmund, "lying in the Skagafirth, called Drangey. It is a place excellent for defence, as no one can reach it without a ladder. If you could get upon Drangey, no one could come on you unawares. You would see anyone who came by boat to the island, and you could pull up a rope-ladder, without which no one would be able to ascend."

"I will try that," said Grettir; "but I have become so fearsome in the dark that not even at the risk of my life can I endure to be alone."

"Well," said Gudmund, "that is my counsel. Trust none but yourself. Treachery lies where least expected."

Grettir thanked him for his advice, and went

away west to see his mother. And he was most joyfully welcomed by her and his young brother Illugi at Biarg. There he remained some nights—not many; for Ramsfirth was only over a brow of hill, and the tidings of his return home was sure in a few days to reach the relatives of Oxmain, when he would again be set on.

I said, after giving an account of Grettir's adventure at Thorhall's-stead with Glam, that there must have been something of fact in that story, and not pure fiction; and now it has been seen how that event coloured and affected his whole after life, leaving his nerves so shaken, that he could not drive off the impression then made on him, and he was ready to run serious risks rather than be subject to the terrors that came on him in the dark when alone.

He told his mother and Illugi how it was with him, and how that he had been advised to go to Drangey, but that he could not; he dare not, in the long winter night, be on that lonely islet by himself.

Then Illugi his brother said, "Grettir, I will be with you."

"Brother holds to brother as hand clasps hand," answered Grettir, and so they parted. All that summer he wandered about in wild places, shifting his quarters repeatedly, and living how he could.

CHAPTER XXXV.

ON THE ISLE.

WHEN summer was now over, and the first snow of winter began to fall, when the days were rapidly shortening, and the sun had gone out of the north to the south, where it began to move in a rapidly narrowing arc, Grettir returned to Biarg and remained there a while. "But," says the saga, "so great grew his fear in the dark that he durst go nowhere as soon as dusk set in." We can see that the many years strain on his nerves had broken them. Hunted about as a wild beast, always forced to be on his guard, never able to sleep without fear

of being murdered in his sleep, the trial had told on him. This was now the winter of 1028. He was aged but thirty-one; his strength of body was not abated, only his nervous force. He had been in outlawry altogether fifteen years, three for the slaying of Skeggi, then he had been outlawed by King Olaf in 1016. On his return to Iceland he had been outlawed in 1017; this was the eleventh year of his outlawry at the suit of Thorir of Garth, an outlawry not only unjust, but according to general opinion illegal, because he had been tried and sentenced in his absence, and without any witnesses having been called to establish his guilt—condemned on hearsay evidence, and he never allowed to defend himself.

Now Illugi, Grettir's sole surviving brother, was aged fifteen, and was a very handsome, honest-looking boy.

"Grettir," said he, "you know what I said. I will go with you to Drangey, if you will take me. I know not that I will be of much help to you, but this I know, that I will be ever true to you, and

will never run from you so long as you stand up. Besides, I shall like to be with you, for here at home we are ever in anxiety for news about you, always fearing the worst; but if I am at your side, I shall know how you fare."

"I would rather have you with me than anyone else," answered Grettir. "But I cannot take you unless our mother consent."

Then said Asdis, "Now I can see that I have the choice of evils. I can ill spare Illugi; yet I know your trouble, Grettir, and that something must be done for you. It grieves me, my sons, to see you both leave me; yet I will not withhold my youngest from you, Grettir. It is right that brother should help brother."

That rejoiced Illugi. Then Asdis gave her sons what things she thought they might want on the island, and they made them ready to depart.

She led them outside the farm inclosure, and then she took farewell of them, saying, "My two sons! There you depart from me, and I dreamed last night that you left me for ever, and would fall together.

What is fated none may fly from. Never shall I see you again, either of you. Be it so, that one fate overtake you both. In my dream I saw your bones whitening on Drangey. Be careful and watchful. My dreams have troubled me greatly. Above all beware of witchcraft. None can cope with the craft of the old."

When she had said this she wept sore.

Then said Grettir, "Weep not, mother, for if we be set on with weapons it will be said of thee that thou hadst men and not girls for thy children. Live on well, and be hale."

So they parted. Grettir and Illugi went to their relatives and visited them, never, however, staying long in any place, and so on by Swine Lake, a long sheet of water in a shallow basin, to the Blend River. This river is of the colour of milk and water, because it is so full of undissolved snow, and milk and water is called Bland, *i.e.* Blend, in Icelandic. Another river enters it that is called the Black Stream, because of the dark colour of the water. Grettir turned up the valley of the Black River and then

over a pass by a pretty lake lying in a mountain lap, down into a broad marshy valley in which are three or four rivers, and boiling springs pouring forth clouds of steam on the hill-slopes. The valley is commanded by a beautiful mountain peak, called the Measuring Peak, because the natives thereabouts reckon distances from it.

Grettir and Illugi went down this valley till they reached the sea, and now there opened before them a glorious view of the fiord, extending out north about forty miles, and from ten to fifteen miles across, between mountains and precipitous cliffs. A little way back from the eastern shore stood up the Unadals Jokull, crowned with perpetual snows and with glaciers rolling down the sides, and on the west, close to the sea, seeming to rise in a wall out of it and running up into fantastic peaks, was the range of Tindastoll, famous for its cornelians and agates and other precious stones. In the offing, fifteen miles out, right in the midst of the fiord, stood up the isle of Drangey with sheer cliffs, about which the sea perpetually danced and foamed.

Grettir and Illugi skirted the shore on the west. The wind was blowing cold, and snow was driving before it, as they passed a farm. The farmer stood in his door, and saw a great man stride by with an axe over his shoulder, his hood thrown back, and his wild red hair blowing about in the gale. "Verily," said the farmer, "that must be a strange fellow not to cover his head with his hood in such weather as this." Near this little farm the brothers stumbled upon a tall, thin man, dressed in rags and with a very big head. They asked each other's names, and the fellow called himself Glaum. He was out of work, and he went along with the brothers chatting, and telling them all the gossip of the neighbourhood. Then Glaum asked if they were in want of a servant, and Grettir gladly accepted him, and the man became thenceforth his constant attendant. But the fellow was a sad boaster, and most people thought him both a fool and a coward. He was not fond of work, and he spent his time strolling about the country picking up and retailing news.

Grettir and his brother and Glaum reached a farm called Reykir as the day closed in, where was a hot spring in the farm paddock. The farmer's name was Thorwald; and Grettir asked him to put him across in a boat to Drangey. Thorwald shook his head and said, "I shall get into trouble with those who have rights of pasturage on the island. I had rather not."

Then Grettir offered him a bag of silver which his mother had given him, and at the sight of this, Thorwald raised his eyebrows and thought that he might perhaps do what was asked. The distance was just five miles.

So on a moonshiny night Thorwald got three of his churls and they rowed Grettir and the two who went with him over. On reaching his destination Grettir was well pleased with the spot, for it was covered with a profusion of grass, and the sides were so precipitous that it seemed a sheer impossibility for anyone to ascend it without the aid of the rope-ladder that hung from strong staples at the summit. In summer the place would swarm with sea-birds,

and at the time there were eighty sheep left on the island for fattening.

A good many farmers had rights of pasturage on the island. Hialti of Hof was one, whose brother's name was Thorbiorn Hook, of whom more hereafter. Another was Haldor, who lived at Head-strand; he had married the sister of these brothers. Biorn, Eric, and Tongue-stone were the names of three others.

Thorbiorn Hook was a hard-headed, ill-disposed fellow. His father had married a second time, and there was no love lost between the stepmother and Thorbiorn. It is said that one day as The Hook was sitting at draughts, she passed, and looking over his shoulder laughed, because he had made a bad move. Thorbiorn Hook thereupon said something abusive and insulting; this so enraged her that she snatched up a draught-man, and pressing it against his eye-socket, drove the eyeball out. He started to his feet, and with the draught-board struck her over the head such a blow that she took to her bed, and died of the injury. The Hook now went from bad to worse, and leaving home settled at Woodwick

on the fiord, a small farm. It will be understood from this story that he was a violent and brutal fellow, and that, indeed, the life in his father's house had not been of an orderly description.

As many as twenty farmers claimed rights to turn out their sheep on Drangey in summer. The way they managed it is the way still employed by their successors. They take the sheep out in boats, and then put them over their shoulders, with the feet tied under their chins, and so they climb the rope-ladder, carrying the sheep up on their backs. Though all these farmers claimed rights on Drangey, The Hook and his brother had the largest share, that is to say, the right to turn out more sheep than the rest.

Now, about the time of the winter solstice, that is just before Yule, the bonders made ready to visit the island, and bring home their sheep for slaughtering for the Christmas feasting. They rowed out in a large boat, and on nearing the island were much surprised to see figures moving on top of the cliffs. How anyone had got there without their

knowledge puzzled them, for Thorwald had kept his counsel, and told no one what he had done for Grettir. They pulled hard for the landing-place, where hung the ladder, but Grettir drew it up before they landed.

The bonders shouted to know who were on the crags, and Grettir, looking over, told his name and those of his companions. The farmers then asked how he had got there? who had put him across?

Grettir answered, "If you very much wish to know, it was not one of you below now speaking to us. It was someone else, who had a good boat and a pair of lusty arms."

"Let us fetch our sheep away," called the bonders, "then you come to land with us. We will not make you pay for the sheep you have eaten, and we will do you no harm."

"Well offered," answered Grettir; "but he who takes keeps hold; and a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Believe me, I will not leave this island till the time of my outlawry is expired, unless I be carried from it dead."

The bonders were silenced, it seemed to them that they had got an ugly customer on Drangey, to get rid of whom would be no easy matter; so they rowed home, very ill-satisfied with the result of their expedition.

The news spread like wildfire, and was talked about all through the neighbourhood. Thorir of Garth was the more embittered, because he could see no way in which Grettir could be reached and overmastered in this inaccessible spot.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF GRETTIR ON HERON-NESS.

WINTER passed, and at the beginning of summer the whole district met at an assize held on the Herons'-ness, a headland in the Skaga-firth, between the rivers that discharge into the fiord. It is, in fact, the seaward point of a large island in the delta of the river that divides about eight miles higher up, inland. The gathering was thronged, and

the litigations and merry-makings made the assize last over many days. Grettir guessed what was going on by seeing a number of boats pass to the head of the fiord. He became restless, and at last announced to his brother that he intended being present at the assize, cost what it might. Illugi thought it was sheer madness, but Grettir was resolute. He begged his brother and Glaum to watch the ladder and await his return.

Now, Grettir was on very good terms with the farmer at Reykir, and with some others on that side of the firth, and they were not unwilling to help him. Sometimes his mother sent things to the brothers that she thought they would need, and then there were not wanting men to take these over to the island. So Grettir got put across by his friend Thorwald to the mainland, and he borrowed of him a set of old clothes, and thus attired he went along the coast boldly to Heron-ness. He had on a fur cap, which was drawn closely over his eyes, and concealed his face, so that no one might recognize him. Now, in parts of Iceland, the flies are such

torments that men have to wear literally cloth helmets, with only nose and eyes showing, the cloth fitting tight to the head, and round over the ears and neck, exactly like a helmet, or a German knitted sledging cap. When I was in Iceland, when the flies were troublesome, I put my head into a butterfly net, and buckled it round my neck tightly with a leather strap. Now, Grettir's cap was something like those I have described, and no one was surprised at his wearing it, as the whole of that valley is one vast marsh, and is infested with flies that blacken the air and madden men and beasts.

Grettir thus attired sauntered between the booths erected on the headland, till he reached the spot where games were going on.

Now, Hialti and Thorbiorn Hook were the chief men in these sports. Hook was specially noisy and boisterous, and drove men together to the sports, and whether men liked it or not, he insisted on their attendance. He would take this man and that by the hands and drag him forth to the field, where the wrestling and other games went on.

Now, first wrestled those who were weakest, and then each man in turn, and great fun there was. But when most men had tried their strength except the very strongest, it was asked who would be a match for Hialti and The Hook. These two being the strongest and the roughest of all, went round inviting each man in turn to wrestle with them, but all declined.

Then Thorbiorn Hook, looking round, spied a tall fellow in the shabbiest and quaintest of suits, sitting by himself, speaking to no one. Thorbiorn walked up to him, laid his hands on his shoulders and asked him to wrestle.

The man sat still, and The Hook could not drag him from his seat.

"Well!" exclaimed The Hook, "no one else has kept his place before me to-day. Who are you?"

"Guest," answered Grettir shortly.

"A wished-for guest thou wilt be, if thou furnish some entertainment to the company," said Thorbiorn Hook.

Grettir answered, "I am indisposed to make a

fool of myself before strangers. How am I to know, supposing that I give you a fall, that I shall not be set upon by you or your kindred, and be unfairly treated?"

Then many exclaimed that there should be fair play.

"It is all very well your saying Fair-play now; but will you say Fair-play, and stick to it, supposing I get the better of this man. You are all akin, or friends, and I am a stranger to you all."

Again he was assured that no one would resent what he did.

"But see," said Grettir, "I have not wrestled for many years, and have lost all skill in the matter."

Yet they pressed him the more.

Then he said, "I will wrestle with whom you will, if you will swear to show me no violence so long as I am among you as a guest."

This all agreed to, and an oath of safe conduct was made, the form of which is so curious that it must be given.



A man named Hafr recited the terms of the oath, and the rest agreed to it.

"Here set I peace among all men towards this man Guest, who sits before us, and in this oath I bind all magistrates and well-to-do bonders, and all men who bear swords, and all men whatsoever in this district, present or absent, named or unnamed. These are to show peace to, and give free passage to the aforenamed stranger, that he may sport, wrestle, make merry, abide with us and depart from us, without stay, whether he go by land or flood. He shall have peace where he is, in all places where he may be till he reaches his house whence he set out, so long and no longer.

"I set this treaty of peace between him and us, our kinsmen male and female, our servants and children. May the breaker of this compact be cast out of the favour of God and good men, out of his heavenly inheritance and the society of just men and angels. May he be an outcast from land to its farthest limits, far as men chase wolves, as Christians frequent churches, as heathen men offer sacrifices,

as flame burns, earth produces herb, as baby calls its mother, and mother rocks her child; far as fire is kindled, ships glide, lightenings flicker, sun shines, snow lies, Finns slide on snow-shoes, fir-trees grow, falcons fly on a spring day with a breeze under their wings; far as heaven bends, earth is peopled, winds sweep the water into waves, churls till corn; he shall be banished from churches and the company of Christian men, from heathen folk, from house and den, from every house—save hell! Now let us be agreed whether we be on mountain or shore, on ship or skate, on ground or glacier, at sea or in saddle, as friend with friend, as brother with brother, as father with son, in this our compact. Lay we now hand to hand, and hold we true peace and keep every word of this oath."

Now, this formula is very curious. It must have been brought by the Icelandic settlers with them from Norway, for parts of it are inappropriate to their land. There are no Finns there, nor do fir-trees grow there, nor is any corn tilled. But all that about Christians is of later origin.

After a little hesitation the oath was taken by all.

Then said Grettir, "You have done well, only beware of breaking your oath. I am ready to do my part, without delay, to fulfil your wishes."

Thereupon he flung aside his hood and garments, and the assembled bonders looked at each other, and were disconcerted, for they saw that they had in their midst Grettir Asmund's son. They were silent, and thought that they had taken the oath somewhat unadvisedly, and they whispered the one into another, to find if there were not some loop-hole by which they might evade the obligation to observe the oath.

"Come now," said Grettir, "let me know your purpose, for I shall not long stand stripped. It will be worse for you than for me if you break your oath, for it will go down in story to the end of time that the men of Heron-ness swore and were perjured."

He received no answer. The chiefs moved away; some wanted to break the truce, and argued that an oath taken to an outlaw was not legally binding;

others insisted that the oath must be observed. Then Grettir sang:

"Many trees-of-wealth (*men*) this morn,
Failed the well-known well to know,
Two ways turn the sea-flame-branches (*men*),
When a trick on them is tried;
Falter folk in oath fulfilling,
Hafr's talking lips are dumb."

Then Tongue-stone said, "You think so, do you, Grettir? Well, I will say this of you, you are a man of dauntless courage. Look how the chiefs are deep in discussion how to deal with you."

Then Grettir sang:

"Shield-lifters (*men*) rubbing of noses,
Shield-tempest-senders (*men*) shake beards,
Fierce-hearted serpent's-lair-scatterers (*men*),
Lay their heads one 'gainst another,
Now that they know, are regretting
The peace they have sworn to to-day."

In these staves a number of periphrases for men or warriors are used—and the use of these periphrases constitute the charm of these verses.

Then Hialti of Hof burst away from the rest, and

said, "No, never, never shall it be said of us men of Heron-ness, that we have broken an oath because we have found it inconvenient to keep it. Grettir shall be at full liberty to go to his place in peace, and woe betide him who lays hand on him, to do him an injury. But an oath no longer binds us should he venture ashore again."

All except Thorbiorn Hook, Hialti's brother, agreed to this, and felt their minds and consciences relieved, that he had spoken out as a man of honour. And thus was seen how of those two brothers, rude and violent though both were, Hialti had some nobleness in him that was lacking in the other.

The wrestling began by Grettir being matched with Thorbiorn Hook, and after a very brief struggle Grettir freed himself from his antagonist, leaped over his back, caught him by the belt, lifted him off his legs, and flung him over his back. This is a throw called "showing the white mare," among Cornish wrestlers of the present day, and a very dangerous throw it is, for it sometimes breaks the back of the man thrown. The Hook, however, picked

himself up, and the wrestling continued with unabated vigour, and it was impossible to tell which side had the mastery, for, though Grettir was matched against both brothers, and after each bout with one brother fell to with the other, he was never thrown down. After all three were covered with blood and bruises the match was closed, the judges deciding that the two brothers conjointly were not stronger than Grettir alone, though they were each of them as powerful as two ordinary able-bodied men.

Grettir at once left the place of gathering, rejecting all the entreaties of the farmers that he would leave Drangey. And, so, after all but The Hook had thanked him for his wrestling and praised his activity and strength, he departed. He was put across from Reykir to his island, and was received with open arms by Illugi.

There now they abode peaceably, and Grettir told his brother and his churl Glaum the story of what had taken place at the assize, and thus the summer wore away.

There was much talk through the island of Iceland

about this adventure, and all good men approved the conduct of the men of the Skagafiord that they had kept the oath they had so inconsiderately taken.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF HŒRING'S LEAP.

THE smaller farmers began seriously to feel their want of the islet Drangey for pasture in summer, and, as there seemed no chance of their getting rid of Grettir, they sold their rights to Thorbiorn Hook, who set himself in earnest to devise a plan by which he might possess himself of the island.

When Grettir had been two winters on the island, he had eaten all the sheep except one piebald ram, with magnificent horns, which became so tame that he ran after them wherever they went, and in the evening came to the hut Grettir had erected and butted at the door till let in.

The brothers liked this place of exile, as there was no dearth of eggs and birds, besides which, some

drift-wood was thrown upon the strand, and served as fuel.

Grettir and Illugi spent their days in clambering among the rocks, and rifling nests, and the occupation of the thrall was to collect drift timber and keep up the fire in the hut. He was expected to remain awake and watch the fire whilst the others slept. He got very tired of his life on the islet, became idle, morose, and reserved. One night, notwithstanding Grettir's warnings to him to be more careful, as they had no boat, he let the fire go out. Grettir was very angry, and told Glaum that he deserved a sound thrashing for his neglect. The thrall replied that he loathed the life he led; and that it seemed it was not enough to Grettir that he should keep him there as a prisoner, he must also maltreat him.

Grettir consulted his brother what was best to be done, and Illugi replied that the only thing that could be done was to await the arrival of a boat from the friendly farmer at Reykir.

"We shall have to wait long enough for that,"

said Grettir. "The bonders have taken it ill that he has favoured us, and he is now unwilling to be seen visiting Drangey. The only chance is for me to swim ashore and secure a light."

"Do not attempt that!" exclaimed Illugi. "That is what you did in Norway, and that led to all your misfortune."

"This case is different," answered Grettir. "Then I brought fire for ill-conditioned men, now it is for ourselves. Then I knew not who was on the other side, but now I can get the fire for the asking from Thorwald."

"But the distance is so great!" remonstrated Illugi.

"Do not fear for me," said Grettir; "I was not born to be drowned."

From Drangey to Reykir is, as already said, about five English miles.

Grettir prepared for swimming, by dressing in loose thin drawers and a sealskin hood; he tied his fingers together, that they might offer more resistance to the water when he struck out.



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GRETTIR DISCOVERED BY THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER.



The day was fine and warm. Grettir started in the evening, when the tide was in his favour, setting in; and his brother anxiously watched him from the rocks. At sunset he reached the land, after having floated and swum the whole distance. Immediately on coming ashore, he went to the warm spring and bathed in it, before entering the house. The hall door was open, and Grettir stepped in. A large fire had been burning on the hearth, so that the room was very warm; Grettir was so thoroughly exhausted that he lay down beside the hot embers, and was soon fast asleep. In the morning he was found by the farmer's daughter, who gave him a bowl of milk, and brought her father to him. Thorwald furnished him with fire, and rowed him back to the island, astonished beyond measure at his achievement, in having swum such a distance.

Now, the farmers on the Skagafiord began to taunt Thorbiorn Hook with his unprofitable purchase of the island, and Hook was greatly irritated and perplexed what to do.

During the summer, a ship arrived in the firth,



the captain of which was a young and active man called Hœring. He lodged with Thorbiorn Hook during the autumn, and was continually urging his host to row him out to Drangey, that he might try to climb the precipitous sides of the island. The Hook required very little pressing; and one fine afternoon he rowed his guest out to Drangey, and put him stealthily ashore, without attracting the notice of those on the height. For in some places the cliffs overhung, so that a boat passing beneath could not be seen from above. Now Hœring had lain in the bottom of the boat, covered with a piece of sailcloth, so that the brothers saw nothing of him as the boat was approaching the islet.

They saw and recognized Thorbiorn Hook and his churls, and at once drew up the ladder. Now it was whilst they were watching at the landing-place that Thorbiorn put Hœring out on another point, where the cliffs seemed possible to be climbed by a very skilful man, and then came on to the usual landing place, and there shouted to Grettir. Grettir replied, and then Thorbiorn began the usual arguments to

persuade the outlaw to leave the isle. He promised to give him shelter in his house the winter, if he would do so. All was in vain. What he sought was to divert Grettir's attention so as to allow time and occasion for Hœring to climb the cliffs unobserved and unresisted.

The discussion went on but led to nothing. In the meantime Hœring had managed most cleverly to get up by a way never ascended by man before or after; and when he came to the top and had his feet on the turf, he saw where the brothers stood with their backs turned towards him, and he thought that now an opportunity had come for him to make himself a great name. Grettir suspected nothing, and continued talking to Thorbiorn, who was getting, or feigning to get, angry, and used big and violent words.

Now, as luck would have it, Illugi chanced to turn his head, and he saw a man approaching from behind.

Then he cried out, "Brother! Brother! Here comes a man at us with uplifted axe!"

"You go after him," said Grettir. "I will watch at the ladder."

So Illugi started to his feet and went to meet Hœring, and when the young merchant saw that he was discovered, he fled away across the islet, and Illugi went after him. And when Hœring came to the edge he leaped down, hoping to fall into the sea; but he had missed his reckoning, and he went upon some skerries over which the waves tossed, and broke every bone in his body, and so ended his life. The spot is called Hœring's Leap to this day.

Illugi came back, and Grettir asked him what had been the end of the encounter. Illugi told him.

"Now, Thorbiorn," shouted Grettir; "we have had enough of profitless talk. Go round to the other side of the island and gather up the remains of your friend."

The Hook pushed off from the strand and returned home, ill pleased with the result of the expedition, and Grettir remained unmolested on Drangey the ensuing winter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OF THE ATTEMPT MADE BY GRETTIR'S FRIENDS.

THE ensuing summer, that is to say, the summer of 1031, at the great annual assize at Thingvalla, all Grettir's kin and friends brought up the matter of outlawry, and contended that he ought to have his sentence done away with. They said that no man could be an outlaw all his life, that was not a condition contemplated by their laws. They said that he had been outlawed first in 1011 for the slaying of Skeggi, and that he had been in outlawry ever since, which made nineteen years.

The old law-man was dead, and now there was another at the assize, whose name was Stein. He laid down that no man might by law be in outlawry more than twenty years. Now, when they came to reckon since 1011 it was nineteen years. It was true that he had been outlawed thrice, once for Skeggi, then by King Olaf, and lastly by the court for the burning of the sons of Thorir of Garth, still—the fact

remained that for nineteen years he had been an outlaw, and Stein laid down that by next assize, that is to say in one year, his outlawry would have expired.

Thereat Grettir's kinsfolk were pleased, for they thought that he would only have to spend one winter more on Drangey, and afterwards his troubles would be at an end; Thorir of Garth and his other foes could no more pursue him, and the price set on his head would fall away.

But on the other hand, Thorir of Garth, who had not become more charitable and forgiving as he grew old, became still more incensed and impatient to have Grettir killed before this year would expire, also Thorbiorn Hook cast about how he might be avenged for the deprivation of his rights over Drangey. The men who had sold their claims came to Thorbiorn, and told him he must do one of two things: get rid of Grettir and assert his rights by turning out sheep on the islet, or they would regard the sale as quashed, by his non-usance of the pasture, and they would reclaim their shares of the island as soon as Grettir's outlawry was at an end, and he left the place.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OF THE OLD HAG.

NOW it was so, that Thorbiorn Hook had a foster-mother, a woman advanced in age, and of a very malicious disposition. When the people of Iceland accepted Christianity, she, in her heart, remained a heathen, and would not be baptized and have anything to do with the new religion. She had always been reckoned a witch, but with the introduction of Christianity witchcraft had been made illegal, and anyone who had recourse to sorcery was severely dealt with. The old woman had not forgotten her incantations and strange ceremonies, whereby she thought to be able to conjure the spirits of evil, and send ill on such as offended her.

When Thorbiorn Hook found that he could contrive in no way to get Grettir out of Drangey, and when he saw that if his expulsion were delayed, and Grettir left of his own accord, he would forfeit the money he had paid for the rights of pasturage on the

island, he went to his foster-mother, and told her his difficulty, and pretty plainly let her understand that as he could get help nowhere else, he did not mind having recourse to the black art.

"Ah!" cackled she, "I see how it is, when all else fails, man's arms and man's wit, then you come to the bed-ridden crone and seek her aid. Well, I will assist you to the best of my power, on one condition, and that is, that you obey me without questioning."

The Hook agreed to what she said, and so all rested till August without the matter being again alluded to.

Then one beautiful day the hag said to Thorbiorn, "Foster-son, the sea is calm and the sky bright, what say you to our rowing over to Drangey and stirring up the old strife with Grettir? I will go with you and hear what he says, then I shall be able to judge what fate lies before him, and I can death-doom him accordingly."

The Hook answered, "It is waste of labour going out to Drangey. I have been there several times and never return better off than when I went."

"You promised to obey me without questioning," said the crone. "Follow my advice and all will be well for you and ill for Grettir."

"I will do as you bid me, foster-mother," said Thorbiorn, "though I had sworn not to go back to Drangey till I was sure I could work the bane of Grettir."

"That man is not laid low hastily, and patience is needed; but his time will come, and may be close at hand. What the end of this visit will be I cannot say. It is hid from me, but I know very well that it will lead to his or to your destruction."

Thorbiorn ran out a long boat, and entered it with twelve men. The hag sat in the bows coiled up amongst rugs and wadmal. When they reached the island, at once Grettir and Illugi ran to the ladder, and Thorbiorn again asked if Grettir would come to his house for the winter.

Grettir made the same reply as before, "Do what you will, in this spot I await my fate."

Now Thorbiorn saw that this expedition also was likely to be resultless, and he became very angry.

"I see," he said, "that I have to do with an ill-conditioned churl, who does not know how to accept a good offer when made. I shall not come here again with such an offer."

"That pleases me well," said Grettir, "for you and I are not like to come to terms that will satisfy both."

At that moment the hag began to wriggle out of her wraps in the bows. Grettir had not perceived her hitherto. Now she screamed out, "These men may be strong, but their strength is ebbing. They may have had luck, but luck has left. See what a difference there is between men. Thorbiorn makes good offers, and such they blindly, foolishly reject. Those who are blinded and cast away chances do not have chances come to them again. And now Grettir"—she raised her withered arms over her head—"I doom you to all ill, I doom you to loss of health, to loss of wisdom and of foresight. I doom you to decline and to death. I doom your blood to fester, and your brain to be clouded. I doom your marrow to curdle and chill. Henceforth, so is my doom, all good things will wane from you, and all evil things

will wax and overwhelm you. So be it." As she spoke a shudder ran over Grettir's limbs, and he asked who that imp was in the boat. Illugi told him he fancied it must be that old heathen woman, the foster-mother of Thorbiorn Hook.

"Since the powers of evil are with our foes," said Grettir, "how may we oppose them? Never before has anything so shaken me with presentiment of evil as have the curses of this witch. But she shall have a reminder of her visit to Drangey."

Thereupon he snatched up a large stone and threw it at the boat, and it fell on the bundle of rags, in the midst of which lay the old hag. As it struck there rose a wild shriek from the witch, for the stone had hit and broken her leg.

"Brother!" exclaimed Illugi, "you should not have done this."

"Blame me not," answered Grettir gloomily. "It had been well had the stone fallen on her head. But I trow the working of her curse is begun, and what I have done has been because my understanding and wit are already clouded."

On the return of Thorbiorn to the mainland the crone was put to bed, and The Hook was less pleased than ever with his trip to the island. His foster-mother, however, consoled him.

"Do not be discouraged," she said. "Now is come the turning-point of Grettir's fortunes, and his luck will leave him more and more as the light dies away up to Yule. But the light dies and comes again. With Grettir it will not be so, it will die, and die, till it goes out in endless night."

"You are a confident woman, foster-mother," said Thorbiorn.

When a month had elapsed, the old woman was able to leave her bed, and to limp across the room.

One day she asked to be led down to the beach. Thorbiorn gave her his arm, and she had her crutch, and she hobbled down to where the water was lapping on the shingle. And there, just washed up on the beach, lay a log of drift-timber, just large enough for a man to carry upon his shoulder. Then she gave command that the log should be rolled over and over that she might examine each side. The

log on one side seemed to have been charred, and she sent to the house for a plane, and had the burnt wood smoothed away.

When that was done she dismissed every one save her foster-son, and then with a long knife she cut runes on the wood where it had been planed—that is to say, words written in the peculiar characters made of strokes which Odin was supposed to have invented. Then she cut herself on the arm, and smeared the letters she had cut with her blood. After that she rose and began to leap and dance, screaming a wild spell round the log, making the most strange and uncouth contortions, and waving her crutch in the air, making with it mysterious signs over the log. Presently, when the incantation was over, she ordered the log to be rolled back into the sea. The tide was now ebbing, and with the tide the log went out to sea further and further from land till Thorbiorn saw it no more.

CHAPTER XL.

HOW THE LOG CAME TO DRANGEY.

IN the meantime Grettir, Illugi, and the churl Glaum were on Drangey catching fish and fowl for winter supplies. The fish in Iceland are beaten hard with stones and then dried in the wind, that makes them like leather; but it preserves them for a very long time, and they form the staple of food, as the people have no corn, and consequently no bread. They put butter on these dry fish, and tear them with their teeth. What Grettir did with the fowl he caught was to pickle them with salt water from the sea, and when the frost and snow came on then he would take them out of pickle and freeze them. Now, the whole of the sheep had been eaten some time ago, except the old mottled ram, which Grettir could not find in his heart to kill; and, as may be supposed, he and his brother suffered from want of change of food. Especially deficient were they in any green food; and we know, though he

did not, that the eating of green food is a very essential element of health. He had nothing for consumption but salted birds and dried fish—no milk, no bread, no vegetables. Such a diet was certain to disorder his health.

The day after that on which the hag had charmed the piece of timber, the two brothers were walking on the little strand to the west of the island looking for drift-wood.

"Here is a fine beam!" exclaimed Illugi. "Help me to lift it on to my shoulder, and I will carry it up the ladder."

Grettir spurned the log with his foot, saying, "I do not like the looks of it, little brother. Runes are cut on it, and what they portend I do not know. There may be written there something that may bring ill. Who can tell but this log may have been sent with ill wishes against us." They set the log adrift, and Grettir warned his brother not to bring it to their fire.

In the evening they returned to their cabin, and nothing was said about the log to Glaum. Next

day they found the same beam washed up not far from the foot of the ladder. Grettir was dissatisfied, and again he thrust it from the shore, saying that he hoped they had seen the last of it, and that the stream and tide would catch it and waft it elsewhere. And now the equinoctial gales began to rage. The fine Martinmas summer was over. The weather changed to storm and rain; and so bad was it that the three men remained indoors till their supply of firewood was exhausted.

Then Grettir ordered the thrall to search the shore for fuel. Glaum started up with an angry remonstrance that the weather was not such as a dog should be turned out in, with unreason, not considering that a fire was as necessary to him as to his master. He went to the ladder, crawled down it, and found the same beam cast at its very foot.

Glad not to have to go far in his search, Glaum shouldered the log, crept up the ladder, bore it to the hut, and throwing open the door, cast it down in the midst.

Grettir jumped up, "Well done," said he, "you have been quick in your quest."

"Now I have brought it, you must chop it up," said Glaum. "I have done my part."

Grettir took his axe. The fire was low and wanted replenishing, and without paying much attention to the log, he swung his axe and brought it down on the log. But the wood was wet and greasy with sea-weed, and the axe slipped, glanced off the beam, and cut into Grettir's leg below the knee, on the shin, with such force that it stuck in the bone.

Grettir looked at the beam; the fire leaped up, and by its light the runic inscription on it was visible. Grettir at once saw evil. "The worst is come upon us," he said sadly, as he cast the axe away, and threw himself down by the fire. "This is the same log that I have twice rejected. Glaum, you have done us two ill turns, first when you neglected the fire and let it go out, and now in that you have brought this beam to us. Beware how you commit a third, for that I foresee will be your bane as well as ours."

Illugi bound up his brother's wound with rag; there was but a slight flow of blood, but it was an ugly gash. That night Grettir slept soundly. For three days and nights he was without pain, and the wound seemed to be healing healthily, the skin to be forming over it.

"My dear brother," said Illugi, "I do not think that this cut will trouble you long."

"I hope not," answered Grettir. "But none can see where a road leads till they have gone through to the end."

On the fourth evening they laid them down to sleep as usual. About midnight the lad, Illugi, awoke hearing Grettir tossing in his bed as though suffering.

"Why are you so uneasy?" asked the boy.

Grettir replied that he felt great pain in his leg, and he thought, he said, that some change must have taken place in the condition of the wound.

Illugi at once blew up the embers on the hearth into a flame, and by its light examined his brother's leg. He found that the foot was swollen and dis-

coloured, and that the wound had reopened, and looked far more angry than he had seen it yet. Intense pain ensued, so that poor Grettir could not remain quiet for a moment, but tossed from side to side. His cheeks were fevered, and his tongue parched. He could obtain no sleep at all.

Illugi never left him, he sat beside him holding his hand, or bringing him water to slake his unquenchable thirst.

"The worst approaches, and there is no avoiding it," said Grettir. "This sickness is sent by the old witch in revenge for the stone I had cast at her."

"I misliked the casting of that stone," said Illugi.

"It was ill that it did not fall on her head," said Grettir. "But what is done may not be undone." Then he heaved himself up into a sitting posture and sang, supporting himself against his brother's shoulder, a lay, of which only fragments have come down to us. A good deal of the lay refers to incidents in Grettir's life, of which no record remains in the saga, and many staves have fallen away and been lost. So we give but a few verses:—

"I fought with the sword in the bye-gone day,
In the day when I was young;
When the Rovers I slew in old Norway,
The land with my action rung.

"I entered the grave of Karr the Old,
I rived his sword away;
I strove with the Troll at Thorod's-stead,
Before the break of day.

"With Thorbiorn Oxmain in the marsh
I fought, and his blood I shed;
Against Thorir of Garth have I stood in arms,
Who long would have me dead.

"For nineteen years, I a hunted man,
On mountain, on moor, and fen;
For nineteen years had to shun and flee
The face of my fellow men.

"For nineteen years all bitter to bear
Both hunger and cold and pain;
And never to know when I laid me down,
If I might awake again.

"And now do I lie with a burning eye,
As a wolf is fain to die;
Whilst the skies are dripping and ocean roars,
And the winds sob sadly by—"

The song was probably composed before, as other-

wise it is not easy to account for its preservation. His head was burning, his thoughts wandered, and he ceased singing. He seemed to be dozing off. But presently he started and shivered, and looked hastily about him.

"Let us be cautious now," he said, "for Thorbiorn Hook will make another attempt. To me it matters little—but to you, brother. Glaum, watch the ladder by day, and draw it up at night. Be a faithful servant, for now all depends on you. Illugi will not leave me, so we are in your hands."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE END OF THE OUTLAW.

THE weather became daily worse, and a fierce north-east wind raged over the country, bearing with it cold and sleet, and covering the fells with the first snows of winter. Grettir inquired every night if the ladder had been drawn up, according to order. Glaum answered churlishly, "How

can you expect folk to live out in such a storm as this? Do you think they are so eager to kill you that they will jeopardize their lives in trying to do this? It is easy to see that a little cut was all that lacked to let your courage leak out."

Grettir answered, "Go! and do not argue with us; guard the ladder as you have been bidden!"

So Illugi drove the churl from the hut every morning, notwithstanding his angry remonstrances; and Glaum was in the worst of humours.

The pain became more acute, and the whole leg inflamed and swollen, signs of mortification appeared, and wounds opened in different parts of the limb, so that Grettir felt that the shadow of death hung over him. Illugi sat night and day with his brother's head on his shoulder, bathing his forehead, and doing his utmost to console the fleeting spirit. A week had elapsed since the wound had been made.

Now, Thorbiorn Hook was at home, ill-pleased at the failure of all his schemes for dispossessing Grettir of the island.

One day his foster-mother came to him, and asked whether he were ready now to pay his final visit to the outlaw?

Thorbiorn replied that he had paid quite as many visits to him as he liked, and that he should not go to Drangey again till Grettir left it; and then, with a sneer he asked his foster-mother whether she wanted to have her second leg broken, and was not satisfied with the fracture of one.

"I will not go to Drangey myself," answered the old woman. "That is unnecessary. I have sent him my salutation, and by this he has received it. Speed away now to Drangey, and find how he relishes my message. But I warn you, you must go now or you will be too late."

Thorbiorn would not listen; he said that her advice last time had led to no advantage when he followed it, and that the weather was too bad to go out in.

"You need go but this once," said the crone. "The storm is of my sending, and is sent to work my ends."

up at nightfall. But instead of doing as he was bidden, the fellow laid himself down at the head of the steps, under a shelter-hut of turf that had been there erected, and went to sleep.

When Thorbiorn and his party reached the shore, they found to their content that the ladder had not been removed.

"Good luck attends on those who wait," said The Hook. "Now, my fellows! the journey will not prove as bootless as you expected. Up the ladder with you! and let us all be cautious and bold!"

So they ascended, one after the other, The Hook taking the lead. On reaching the top he looked into the shelter-hut, and there found Glaum, asleep and snoring. Thorbiorn struck him over the shoulders, and asked him who he was.

Glaum turned on his side, rubbed his eyes, and growled forth, "Can you not leave a poor wretch alone? Never was a man so ill-treated as am I. I may not even sleep out here in the cold."

The Hook then knew who this was. "Fool!" shouted he. "Look up, and see who are come. We

are your foes, and intend to kill every one of you."

Glaum started now to his feet full awake, and shrieked with dismay when he saw the black figures crowding up from the ladder and surrounding him.

"Make no noise," said Thorbiorn Hook. "I give you the choice of two things; answer the questions I put to you truthfully, or die at once."

The churl answered sullenly that he would speak, and he had nothing to conceal.

"Then tell me where the brothers are?"

"In the hovel I left them, where there is a fire. Not out in the cold. Grettir is sick and nigh on death, and Illugi is with him."

The Hook asked for particulars, and then Glaum told him about the log, and how Grettir was wounded. Thereat the Hook burst out laughing, and said, "Woe to the man that leans on a churl! That is a true proverb. Shamefully have you betrayed your trust, Glaum."

Thereupon Glaum was dragged along to the cabin where Grettir lay, and they treated him so roughly,

that what with their blows and what with fear, he was nearly senseless when he reached it.

Illugi had been sitting by the fire with his brother's head in his lap, whilst Grettir lay in some sheep-skins beside the hearth. All that evening the sick man's eyes had been wandering about the roof, watching the light play among the rafters, as the fire-wood blazed up or smouldered away. Illugi saw that his fingers plucked at the wool of the sheep-skins, riving it out, and that he knew was a bad sign. He felt sure that Grettir would die that night, and he watched his face intently, and could not bear to withdraw his eyes from him, for he loved him dearly. Presently Grettir turned his head, and smiled when he saw how he was watching him, and said that he felt easier, and would sleep. In a few moments his eyes closed.

As he dozed, his face became calmer than Illugi had seen it before; the muscles relaxed, and the wrinkles furrowed in his brow by care and suffering were now smoothed quite away. Grettir's face was never handsome, but it was grave and earnest, and

the sorrow and trial he had passed through had left its trace on his features. His breath now came more evenly in sleep.

All at once there sounded a crash at the door, and the sleeper opened his eyes dreamily.

"It is only the old ram, brother," said Illugi. "He is butting, because he wants to come in."

"He butts hard! he butts hard!" muttered Grettir, and at that moment the door burst open. They saw faces looking in.

Illugi was on his feet in a moment. He seized his sword, flew to the doorway and defended it bravely, so that no one could pass through.

Thorbiorn called to some of the men to get upon the roof, and he was obeyed. The hovel was low, and in a moment four or five were on top of it tearing off the turf that covered it. Grettir tried to rise to his feet, but could only stagger to his knees. He seized his spear and drove it through the roof, so that it struck Karr in the breast, and the wound was his death.

Thorbiorn Hook called to the men to act more



warily—they were twenty-five in all against two men, and one dying.

So the men pulled at the gable ends of the house and got the ridge-piece out, that it broke and fell, and with it a shower of turfs, into the hut.

Grettir drew his short-sword—the sword he had taken from the barrow of Karr the Old—and smote at the men as they leaped upon him from the wall. With one blow he struck Vikarr over the left shoulder, as he was on the point of springing down. The sword cut off his arm. But the blow was so violent, that Grettir, having dealt it, fell forward, and before he could raise himself Thorbiorn Hook struck him between the shoulders, and made a fearful wound.

Then cried Grettir, "Bare is the back without brother behind it!" and instantly Illugi threw his shield over him, planted one foot on each side of him as he lay on the floor, and defended him with desperate courage.

The mist of death was in Grettir's eyes; he attempted in vain to raise himself, but sank again



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ILLUGI DEFENDS THE DYING GRETTIR.





on the sheep-skins, which were now drenched in blood.

No one could touch him, for the brave boy warded off every blow that was aimed at his brother.

Then Thorbiorn Hook ordered his men to form a ring round and close in on them with their shields and with beams. They did so, and Illugi was taken and bound; but not till he had wounded most of his opponents, and had killed three of Thorbiorn's men.

"Never have I seen one braver of your age," said The Hook. "I will say that you have fought well."

Then they went to Grettir, who lay where he had fallen, unable to resist further, for he had lost consciousness. They dealt him many a blow, but hardly any blood flowed from his wounds. When all supposed he was dead, then Thorbiorn tried to disengage the sword from his cold fingers, saying that he considered Grettir had wielded it long enough. But the strong man's hand was clenched around the handle so firmly that his enemy could not free the sword from his grasp.

Several of the men came up, and tried to unweave

the fingers, but were unable to do so. Then the Hook said, "Why should we spare this wretched outlaw? Off with his hand!" And his men held down the arm whilst Thorbiorn hewed off the hand at the wrist with his axe.

After that, standing over the body, and grasping the hilt of the sword in both hands, he smote at Grettir's head; the edge of the blade was notched by the blow.

"Look!" laughed Thorbiorn. "This notch will be famous in story for many generations; for men will point to it and say, 'This was made by Grettir's skull.'" He struck twice and thrice at the outlaw's neck, till the head came off in his hands.

"Now have I slain a notable man!" exclaimed Thorbiorn. "I will take this head with me to land, and claim the price that was set on it; and none shall deny that it was my hand that slew that Grettir whom all else feared."

The men present said he might say what he liked, but that they believed Grettir was already dead when he smote him.



Thorbiorn now turned to Illugi, and said, "It is a pity that a brave lad like you should die, because you are associated with outlaws and evil-doers."

"I tell you this," said Illugi, "that I will appear before you at the great assize, and there will charge you with having practised witchcraft to effect my brother's death."

"You hearken to me, boy," said Thorbiorn. "Put your hand to mine, and swear that you will not seek to avenge the death of your brother, and I will let you go; but if you will not take this oath, you shall die."

"And hearken to me, Thorbiorn," said Illugi. "If I live, but one thought shall occupy my heart night and day, and that will be how I may best avenge my brother. Now that you know what to expect of me—take what course you will."

Thorbiorn drew his companions aside to ask their advice; but they shrugged their shoulders, and replied that, as he had planned the expedition, he must carry it out as he thought best.



"Well," said The Hook, "I have no fancy for having the young viper lying in wait to sting me wherever I tread. He shall die."

Now, when Illugi knew that they had determined on slaying him, he smiled and said, "You have chosen that course which is best to my mind. I do not desire to be parted from my brother."

The day was breaking. They led Illugi to the east side of the island, and there they slew him.

It is told that they neither bound his eyes nor his hands, and that he looked fearlessly at them when they smote him, and neither changed colour nor even blinked.

Then they buried the brothers beneath a cairn in the island, but they took the head of Grettir and bore it to land. On the way they also slew the thrall Glaum.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOW ASDIS RECEIVED THE NEWS.

HAD the old hag, Thorbiorn's foster-mother, any hand in the death of Grettir? Certainly none. It was true that Grettir was wounded in the way described, by his own axe, but the condition of the wound was due to the scorbutic condition of his blood, through lack of green food. This the Icelanders did not understand; they could not comprehend how a wound could seem to be healing well and then break out and mortify afterwards, and they supposed that this was due to witchcraft. Then, again, Grettir's kin could not take the case of Grettir's murder into court, because Thorbiorn had acted within the law when killing him; but by charging him with the practice of witchcraft they made him amenable to the law. So, partly, no doubt, in good faith, they trumped up against Thorbiorn the accusation of having effected Grettir's death by witchcraft.

Now, it must be told how that, one day after the slaying of Grettir, Thorbiorn Hook at the head of twenty armed men rode to Biarg, in the Midfirth-dale, with Grettir's head slung from his saddle-bow. On reaching the house he dismounted and strode into the hall, where Grettir's mother was seated with a servant. Thorbiorn threw her son's head at her feet, and said: "See! I have been to the island and have prevailed."

The lady sat proudly in her seat, and did not shed a tear; but lifting her voice in reply, she sang:

"Milk-sop—as timid sheep
Before a fox all cow'ring keep;
So did you—nor could prevail
So long as Grettir's strength was hale.
Woe is on the Northland side,
Nor can I my loathing hide!"

After this The Hook returned home, and folk wondered at Asdis, saying that only a heroic mother could have had sons so heroic. When Yule was over The Hook rode east away to Garth, and told Thorir what he had done, and claimed the money set on Grettir's head.



But Thorir was crafty, and just as the Biarg folk sought a charge against Thorbiorn for his deed, so did Thorir, that he might escape having to pay the silver. He answered, "I do not deny that I offered the money on Grettir's head, promising it to whomsoever should slay Grettir, but I will pay nothing to him who compassed his death by witchcraft; and if what the men who went with you say be true, you did not slay him with a sword, but hacked off his head after he was dead."

This made Thorbiorn Hook very angry, and when summer came he brought his suit against Thorir for the money. But simultaneously Grettir's kin brought a charge against Thorbiorn for having practised witchcraft. Also they had a summons against him for the slaying of Illugi. Now, the case was tried, and hotly discussed, and it ended this way:—It was judged that Thorbiorn had struck off the head of a man who was already dead, and that he had brought about the death of that man by witchcraft; thereupon it was judged that he should receive nothing of the money, and that he should be outlawed from Iceland.

So he went away and never returned.

Now, Grettir and Illugi were brought to land, and their bones lie at Reykir, where was the friendly farmer who had helped them when they were at Drangey. But Grettir's head was buried at Biarg. There is now no church or churchyard there, but there is a mound in the *tún* where his head is said to lie. I obtained leave to dig there, and I examined the spot, but found only a great stone under the turf, and this we had not the appliances to move. And perhaps it was as well; for if Grettir's head be there, it were better that there it should rest undisturbed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOW DROMUND KEPT HIS WORD.

NOW, after that Thorbiorn Hook had been outlawed, he found that he had gotten to himself no advantage, but great harm by what he had done upon Drangey. He was forced to leave Iceland; and he saw, withal, that never again might he set

foot therein again with safety, for all the relatives of the Biarg family would seek his life. Accordingly he made over his farm at Woodwick to his brother Hialti, and also all his rights over the island of Drangey, such as they were. Then he collected together what moveable goods he had, and went on board ship and sailed for Norway.

On reaching Norway he bragged much of what he had done in having slain Grettir, of whom tales were told in Norway; and, as may well be understood, he told the tale of the slaying of Grettir in his own way, magnifying his heroism, and saying nothing about such matters as lessened the greatness of his deed.

During the early winter tidings reached Thorstein Dromund at Tunsberg that his brother Grettir was dead, and also that the man who slew him was in the north of the country. When Dromund heard the tidings he was very sorrowful, and he called to mind the words he had said to Grettir when they showed each other what sort of arms they had. Dromund considered that he was bound to avenge his brother's death on his murderer.

Thorbiorn Hook also was aware that there was a half-brother of Grettir in Norway, and when he knew that he was wary, for he suspected that Dromund would seek his life. And, indeed, Thorstein Dromund sent spies to watch Thorbiorn Hook; but the latter was so careful of himself that Dromund was not able to attempt anything against him all that winter. No sooner did the soft, warm, spring breezes begin to blow, than The Hook got away out of Norway by the earliest opportunity. He had heard much talk how that the Emperors of the East, at Constantinople, kept a guard of Norsemen about them, and paid them well, and how that this guard was held in high esteem. So Thorbiorn Hook considered he could not do better than go to Constantinople, and try his fortune there. But before he left Norway he talked of his intention, and this was reported to Dromund at Tunsberg. So Dromund put his lands and affairs into the hands of his kinsmen, and got ready for journeying in search of Hook, whom he had never seen.

He sailed away after him, and wherever he came he made inquiries after the ship in which Thorbiorn

Hook had been, and he was always just too late. He never could catch the ship up. And then finally Thorbiorn left the vessel and journeyed overland, and Thorstein lost his traces.

However, Dromund knew that Thorbiorn Hook was going to Constantinople, so he travelled thither also, and reached the imperial city. Now there were a great many Norsemen and Icelanders there in the company called the Varangians, who acted as a bodyguard to the Emperor, and among these men were some twenty or more called Thorbiorn, and which among them was the murderer of Grettir, Thorstein Dromund did not know. The Hook, as may well be imagined, did not tell anyone what his nickname was; not that he imagined he was pursued, but because it was not a pretty and flattering name. Thorstein also offered himself as a soldier in the guard, and was enrolled. He also merely gave his name as Thorstein, and told no one of his nickname of Dromund, lest the man he pursued should take alarm and leave.

So time passed, and Thorstein Dromund could not find out his man; and he lay awake in bed many

nights musing on what he had undertaken, on the sad lot of Grettir, and on his ill-success in finding the murderer of his half-brother. Now, it fell out that on a certain day the order came to the Varangian guard that they were to be ready, as they were about to be sent on an expedition of importance.

It was usual, before any such an expedition, that all the men of the guard should burnish up their weapons and armour, and show them, that they were in condition.

So was it on this occasion also. They were assembled in the guard-room, and each produced his weapon. Then Thorbiorn held forth his short-sword —the very weapon that Grettir had taken from the tomb of Karr the Old, the sword with which he The Hook had hewed off Grettir's head.

Now, when Thorbiorn held forth the sword all the other guardsmen praised it, and said it was an excellent weapon; but it had one grievous blemish, for that there was a notch in the edge.

"Oh!" laughed Thorbiorn, "that notch is no blemish at all. It is a memorial of one of my greatest achievements."

"What was that?" asked one of the Varangians.

"With this sword," answered Thorbiorn, "I slew the man who was esteemed the greatest and most powerful champion of his time; a man who was in outlawry for twenty years, who had in his time fought and beaten off as many as thirty or forty who attacked him. But I was too much for him. When I went against him, then he had to give way. We fought for an hour without flagging, and finally I smote him down. Then I took from him his own sword, and with it I smote off his neck; and thus got the sword its notch."

"And his name?" asked Thorstein Dromund.

"His name was Grettir the Strong."

There was a pause; and in that pause the sword was handed to Dromund for him to look at.

"Thus is Grettir avenged!" suddenly exclaimed Dromund. He struck across the table at Thorbiorn with Grettir's own sword; and so great was the stroke that it smote through his skull to the jaw-teeth, and The Hook fell without a word, dead.

It was said, in after times, that Grettir was wonderful in his life, and wonderful in his death—**for**

in life no man had been his equal in strength, and had had a sadder span of life; and in death he was wonderful—for of all Icelanders he was the only one who was avenged far away from home by the shores of the Bosphorus, in the City of the Emperors.

EPILOGUE.

IN the Icelandic annals the death of Grettir is set down as having occurred in 1033, but the dates are not quite correct, and the real date should be 1031.

Grettir is mentioned in other Icelandic sagas. He is spoken of and his pedigree given in the Landnama Book, the Icelandic Domesday, the most reliable book for history they have. The persons spoken of in the saga of Grettir are heard of in several other quite independent sagas, and in no case is there any serious anachronism.

Grettir, it will be recalled, was taken by the farmers in the Ice-firth. This incident is also related in the saga of the Foster-brothers; so is another in-



cident about a contest concerning a dead whale I have not related, as likely to break the continuity of the history. In the saga of Thord, the hero is said to have blessed the Middle-firth in these words: "Let the man who grows up in this vale never be hung." And this blessing was thought to have had something to do with the saving of Grettir's neck in the Ice-firth. The story of Gisli has been told whom Grettir whipped. Now, in the Viga-styr saga, the most ancient of all Icelandic sagas, we hear of this same Gisli, and his character is painted in the same colours as in the saga of Grettir, but no mention is made of the whipping administered by Grettir. The murder of Atli, the brother of our outlaw, and the consequent slaying of Thorbiorn Oxmain is spoken of in the saga of Bard. The circumstance of Grettir having lived in a cave on the farm in Hit-dale is spoken of in the saga of Biorn. In the history of Grettir mention is made of the strife which took place between Biorn and Thord, but the full particulars of what is there alluded to casually are given in the saga of Biorn of Hit-dale. In our saga, Grettir is spoken of as meeting Bard

wounded after a hard fight, in which he had avenged the death of his brother, but no particulars are given. In the saga of the Heath-fights we recover the whole story. Thus one saga explains and supports another.

It is therefore impossible to set down the story of Grettir as fabulous. It is historical; but the history has been somewhat embellished, partly by family vanity which led to the undue glorification of their hero, and partly by superstition which imagined the marvellous where all was really natural.

THE END.



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